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ABSTRACT

Many small, inland, and remote Australian rural communities continue to lose population and businesses, a trend that has intensified over the last 2 decades. Mean age continues to rise, while the 15-24 age group contracts dramatically. Such declining demographics are caused by the stress and uncertainty of volatile world commodity markets, as well as by environmental concerns, technology changes, changing lifestyles, low income and rising debt levels, declining educational and health services, deteriorating infrastructure, high family and business costs, and recent policies that centralize services. However, some communities have been able to build resilient characteristics and plan and implement a range of survival and revival strategies resulting in improved quality of life and economic opportunities. This handbook is designed to enhance the capacity of small rural communities to take proactive renewal initiatives by focusing on what communities are doing. Fourteen case studies are presented of small Australian towns with populations of less than 3,500 that have made positive local development possible. Although each case is unique, common themes include right timing; use of community planning processes; enthusiastic local leadership; positive attitude; local entrepreneurship; local investment; smart use of outside training, technical assistance, and financial resources; new community networks; and focus on retaining young people through employment, recreational, and educational initiatives. Contact information is presented for each case study. (Contains 420 references.) (TD)

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Small Town Renewal

Overview and Case Studies

Small Town Renewal
Change the future of your community

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**A report for the Rural Industries Research
and Development Corporation**

by Peter Kenyon and Alan Black (editors)

in conjunction with

Jim Cavaye, John Duff, Michael O'Meara and Peter Palmer

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Foreword

Although long-term economic, technological and social factors have resulted in the decline of many small inland towns in Australia, other such towns have successfully implemented a range of survival and revival strategies. This has resulted in positive outcomes for residents in terms of quality of life and economic opportunities.

This publication is designed to assist others to learn from the experiences of fourteen of these towns, each of which has a population of less than 3,000 people. Whilst these towns vary among themselves in history and geography, there are some recurring elements in the processes of their social and economic revitalisation. As well as examining these particular processes, this kit provides information on a wide range of resources that are available to assist rural communities in developing strategies appropriate to their own situations.

This project was funded from RIRDC Core Funds, which are provided by the Federal Government.

This report, a new addition to RIRDC's diverse range of over 700 research publications, forms part of our Human Capital, Communications and Information Systems Program, which includes investigations on rural social issues and issues relating to rural communities both in towns and on farms.

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Peter Core
Managing Director
Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation

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'You can change the future of your community or you can sit
back and allow whatever happens to happen.

You can create your own destiny.
However, the cost is high.
It means organising a group of people who are willing to give
of their time and energy to make things happen.
It means believing in yourself and your organisation.

It means putting aside individual differences to work together for the good of the community.

It means working together to decide what you want for the future and then working together to make it happen.

You can do it.
People are doing it.'

(Jack McCall, 'Small Town Survival Manual' 1988:14)

'Nowadays towns are really not so different from businesses,
they need to keep recreating themselves.
Not so many years ago country towns were subject to general trends.
They would all do well or all do badly. The picture is now very uneven.
The successful towns are likely to be driven by people who are
passionate and creative, who see and opportunity and go for it.
You need communities with a bit of get up and go spirit.
Some have it, some don't'.

(Roy Powell, Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics,
quoted in Derriman 1999:1)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Small Town Renewal
Change the future of your community

Small town Australia is certainly at a crossroads. Many small inland and remote rural communities continue to haemorrhage in terms of population and business loss. This decline is not new, but has intensified over the last two decades. Mean age continues to rise, while the 15-24 age group contracts dramatically. Such a situation is not uniquely Australian. Similarities can be seen in the rural communities of midwest USA, New Zealand and South Africa.

Declining demographics are often the product of history and geography, and the stress and uncertainty of volatile world commodity markets, particularly within communities traditionally based on mining, fishing and traditional agriculture. In addition, there are other external pressures affecting the stability of small rural community life: growing environmental concerns, rapid technology changes, changing lifestyle options and consumer habits, low income and rising debt levels, decline in education and health services, national competition policy and practices, deteriorating infrastructure and high family and business costs. Also, throughout the later half of the twentieth century, the government and private sector policies that have sought to regionalize and centralise services have cumulatively had a major negative impact on small towns. Internationally, these issues are common themes, and affect most small inland and remote rural towns and communities.

However, despite the widespread economic and demographic decline of many small towns, other small communities have shown remarkable economic persistence and population stability and even growth: *'local government development initiatives, specific local factors, urban push factors and small-scale flexible industry have enabled some ... communities to adapt to the processes of change occurring at a higher national or global scale'* (Tonts 1996:32).

There is a growing number of rural communities, both within Australia and internationally, that have recognised the long term effects of population and service decline, and despite the above issues and pressures have opted not to merely cope with a declining quality of life, but to adapt, embrace change and begin to prosper. They have begun to build resilient[1] characteristics and to plan and implement a range of rural survival and revival strategies. This has resulted in positive outcomes for residents in terms of quality of life and economic opportunities.

These positive outcomes include:

- stabilising, and in many cases increasing, the size of population;
- retaining and attracting young men and women;
- diversifying the economic and employment base of the community;
- maintaining an adequate range of services and quality of life for residents;
- increasing the levels of civic participation and community pride by residents; and
- preserving what is special about the community.

It is vital that communities, governments and development agencies assess and understand why some rural towns have been able to achieve community and economic renewal, while other communities of similar location, size and weather characteristics continue to decline. The identification and replication of these renewal factors and processes that have enabled positive change is an issue of national significance.

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[1] 'resilience' refers to 'intentional action to enhance the personal and collective capacity of its citizens and institutions to respond to, and influence the course of social and economic change' (Centre for Community Enterprise 2000:2)

Increasingly, governments and development agencies are recognising the importance of communities rebuilding from the 'bottom up' and 'inside out', rather than the traditional model of 'top down' and 'outside in'. They are implementing a range of community facilitation, technical assistance and funding schemes to foster rural renewal. However assistance is still limited, and Collits (2000:3) captured the situation well – *'current efforts seek to provide small towns with hope for their futures, but hope based on their own efforts'*.

This Handbook is designed to generate action for community change and renewal by focussing on what communities are doing and can do. It seeks to enhance the capacity of small rural communities to take proactive renewal initiatives . It provides information, tools, resources and encouragement through:

- reviewing relevant and international literature and experiences related to small town renewal;
- analysing the experiences and lessons of fourteen small rural Australian communities that have in recent years experienced significant community and economic revitalisation;
- providing a set of process and development tools and Information Sheets to assist with planning and implementation of local development efforts; and
- compiling a comprehensive summary of key resources, including technical assistance programs, funding services and relevant publications related to rural renewal.

The Handbook is written primarily for two groups. Firstly, it is designed for those community builders who are able to fulfil that 'spark plug' role within their community:

- people who can sense the need for community change and renewal, and know that the community needs to take responsibility for its future;
- people who can inspire a core group within the community to initiate action; and
- people who can motivate broad based community participation in planning and action.

Secondly, the handbook is intended as a resource for those individuals who provide a professional facilitation function with communities. Dictionary definitions of the word '*facilitate*' include phrases like - *'to make easy', 'promote', 'help forward to an action or result', 'to remove difficulty', 'promote ease or readiness with aptitude, dexterity of fluency'*.

National and international experience has shown the importance of facilitators being able to fulfil the following roles:

- Energiser - creating an atmosphere of energy, excitement, optimism and positiveness;
- Broker - linking communities to experiences, methodologies, tools, networks, information and resources that may be relevant to their needs and aspirations;
- Coach - optimising the knowledge, confidence and experience of community participants by demystifying concepts, processes and strategies, facilitating group discussions and helping to overcome stumbling blocks and conflict.
- Champion - promoting the community and its revival efforts to the wider world.

Finally, this Handbook has been designed to assist users through the following steps:

- understanding the issues impacting upon small town rural life;
- demystifying the concept of, and processes involved in, small town renewal through the international and national experiences and case studies;
- assessing their own community's level of vibrance/resilience and potential for change;
- developing their own responses to the key questions of 'where are we?'; 'what have we got?'; 'what do we want?' and 'how do we get there?'; and
- identifying possible tools and technical and financial resources that could assist them with their small town renewal efforts.

2. INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW OF RURAL AUSTRALIA

Small towns and their rural districts face accelerating demographic, economic, social, technical and environmental changes and challenges. An understanding of these changes and their root causes is an essential starting point for community revitalisation.

A. Demographic Change

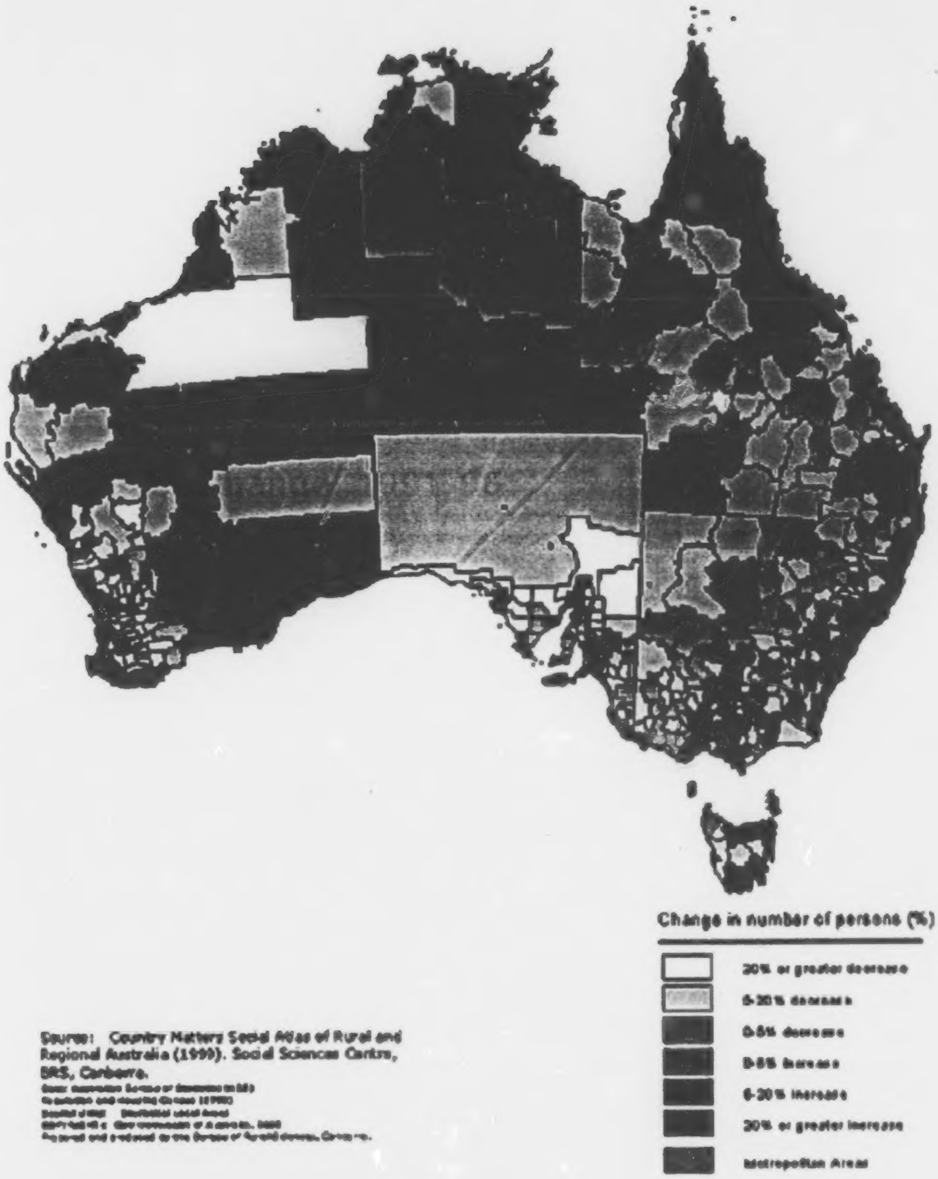
Throughout the twentieth century, Australians deserted what is affectionately referred to as 'the bush' and became predominantly urban city dwellers clinging to the coast. At the beginning of the twentieth century, most Australians lived in inland rural areas. 54% of the population lived in 'the bush' and only 37% of the population lived within what are now the eight state and territory capital cities. Another 9% of population inhabited large coastal towns. By the end of the twentieth century, 'the bush'-big city ratio of Australians had almost reversed – 21% now live in 'the bush' and 63% and 16% respectively within capitals and coastal provincial cities. 70% of Australians now live in 10 cities, up from 41% in 1900 (Salt, 2000).

Continuous population decline for many small inland towns and communities has now become a consistent trend, with over 50% of inland small towns and communities losing population. The KPMG annual publication, *Population Growth (2000)*, reveals that during the twenty two year period, 1976-1998, 198 rural municipalities lost population. In fact 75 communities lost more than 20% of population. Between 1998-99, 120 rural municipalities lost more than 1% of their population base. Of the 456 rural municipalities, the Australian Bankers Association Study (1998:2) found 215 municipalities have been subject to – *'..a process of sustained population loss since 1976. The result is a process of demographic erosion that has reduced the number of people in these 215 municipalities from 883,747 in 1976 to 778,452 in 1996, representing a decrease of 12%'*.

The 1976-1998 KPMG study shows that significant population loss was associated with changed mining practices (eg, West Coast, Tasmania – 44% population loss), and the closure of key services (eg, District Council of Peterborough in South Australia lost 31% of its population, mainly due to closure of railway workshops). However the greatest population loss has happened in the wheat/sheepbelt and the dryland grazing areas where the pressures of farm number shrinkage and aggregation, and the sponge attraction effects of large regional cities are the most felt. For example, the wheatbelt Western Australian town of Perenjori, the Shire of Buloke in Victoria's Wimmera and the south west Queensland Shire of Isisford lost 46%, 34% and 35% of their population respectively.

The extent of decline as illustrated by loss in general population, youth population (aged 15-24) and agricultural employment is illustrated by the following three maps prepared by the Bureau of Rural Sciences (Haberkorn et al., 1999).

Population change, 1991-96


Change in number of persons (%)
20% or greater decrease
5-20% decrease
0-5% decrease
0-5% increase
5-20% increase
20% or greater increase
Metropolitan Areas

Source: Country Matters Social Atlas of Rural and Regional Australia (1999). Social Sciences Centre, BRS, Canberra.
[illegible]
Population and Housing Census (1996)
[illegible]
[illegible]
Prepared and [illegible] by the Bureau of Rural Sciences, Canberra.

Map 1 Population change, 1991-96

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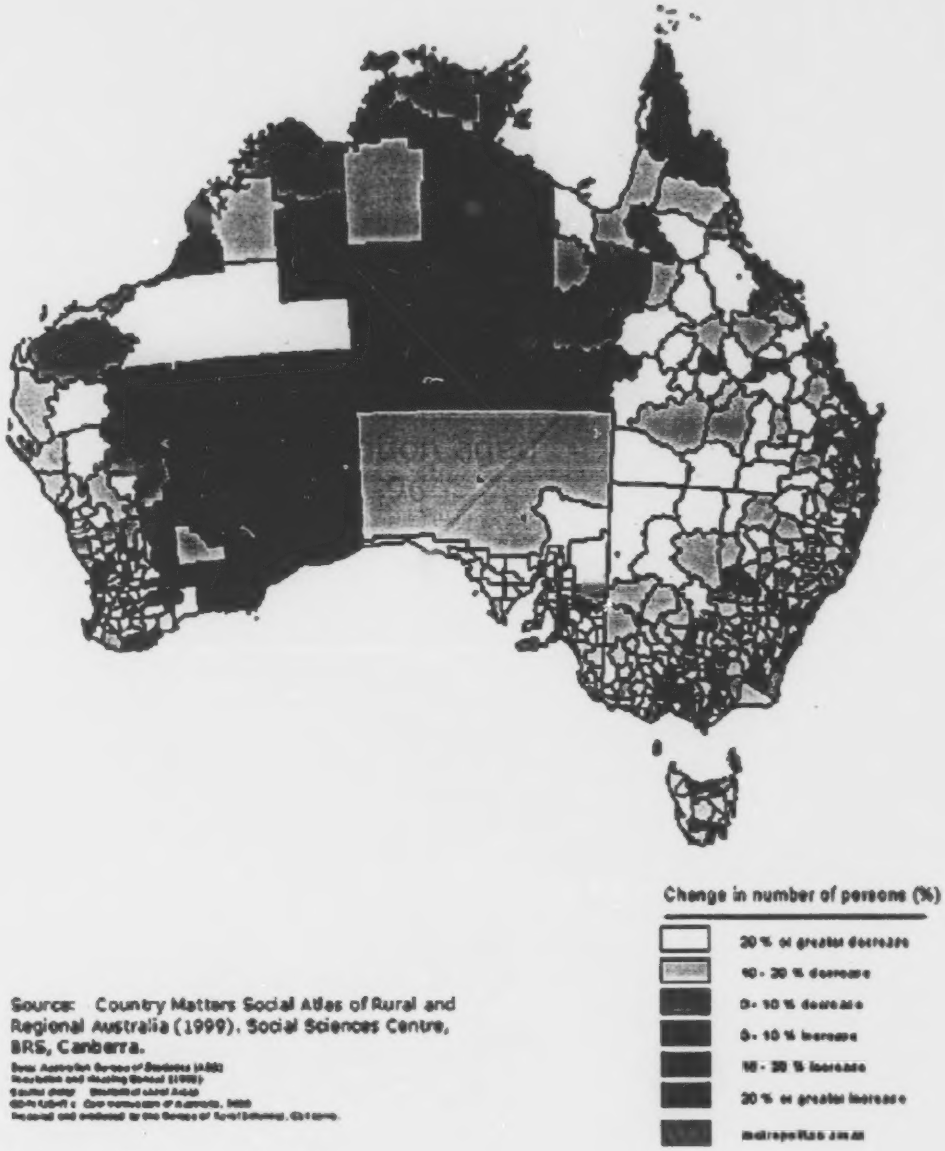
Change in the population aged 15 to 24 years, 1991-96


Change in number of persons (%)
20 % or greater decrease
10 - 20 % decrease
0 - 10 % decrease
0 - 10 % increase
10 - 20 % increase
20 % or greater increase
metropolitan areas

Source: Country Matters Social Atlas of Rural and Regional Australia (1999). Social Sciences Centre, BRS, Canberra.

[illegible]

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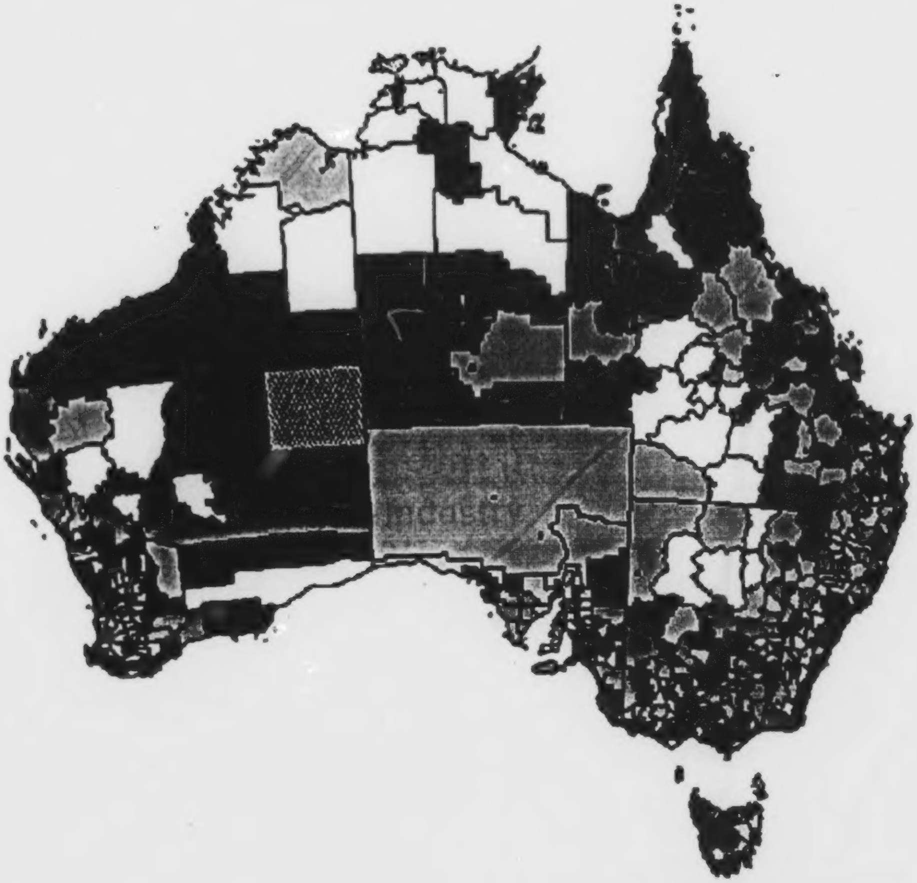
Change in agricultural industry employment, 1991-1996



Change in number of persons (%)

☐	30% or greater decrease
▨	10-20% decrease
■	0-10% decrease
■	0-10% increase
■	10-20% increase
■	20% or greater increase
▩	no data
■	metropolitan areas

Source: Country Matters Social Atlas of Rural and Regional Australia (1999). Social Sciences Centre, BRS, Canberra.

[illegible]

[illegible]

The above maps also illustrate the striking spatial differences in population growth and decline between rural areas. 'Close' communities surrounding capital cities and

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major urban centres, near the coast, or with resort or retirement amenity, together with some regional centres are gaining population (Haberkorn et al., 1999). On the other hand, communities 'remote' from major centres or coastal concentrations of population struggle to maintain population, infrastructure and services. Fuguitt (1978), Luloff (1990), Flora et al., (1992) and Clawson (1980) outline similar patterns in the United States.

While there is a significant counter urbanisation trend in North America (O'Mally, 1994), it is less pronounced in Australia. There has been a considerable slowing of net losses from capital cities to non-metropolitan areas over the last decade with interstate migration being the main driver of counter-urbanisation (Hugo, 2000).

Regarding youth loss, there has long been an established pattern of young adults moving from rural areas to the city (Hugo, 1971). While a proportion of rural-urban migrants return, there are currently record net losses of young adults from non-metropolitan areas (Hugo, 2000). Higher education, job opportunities or the motivation to travel and broaden experience 'pull' young rural people from their home towns (Hajesz and Dawe, 1997). Perceptions of boredom, not 'fitting in' and being in a 'goldfish bowl' of small town life 'pushes' young people from rural areas (Derounian, 1993).

B. Economic Change

One of the major economic changes in rural Australia has been the economic decline of agriculture. The NSW Government Rural Social Justice statement (1988:4) captured simply the challenge for agriculture – '*the farm sector - for so long the backbone of the regional economy - continues to be faced with long term adjustment pressures and an uncertain trading environment. Farmers have had to contend with drought, flood, declining commodity prices, low profitability, and the consequences of past high interest rates and rising debt. The last decade has seen substantial industry restructuring.*'

Increased production, technology, developing markets and diversification have maintained the value of Australian agricultural production at relatively stable levels for decades (Figure 1). However, over the same period, world prices have led to a cost/price squeeze decreasing Australian farmer's terms of trade (prices received for outputs as a percentage of costs incurred in production) from over 200 in 1952-53 to 98 in 2000-01 (ABARE, 2000).

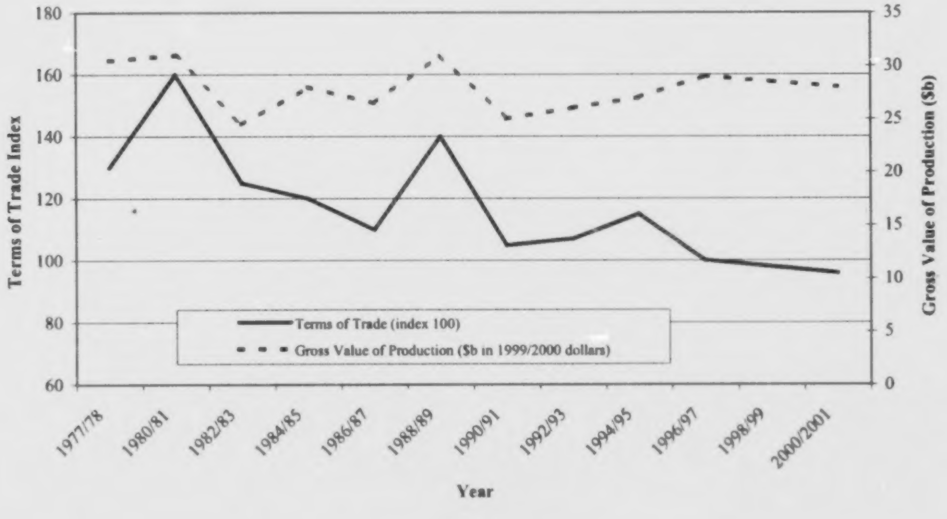

Figure 1. The increase in the value of agricultural production and the corresponding fall in farm terms of trade (ABARE, 2000).

These pressures have moved agricultural production onto fewer and larger farms. Over the last forty years, average farm size in Australia has doubled while the number of farms has almost halved (ABARE, 1998). This trend is repeated in both the USA and Europe (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990; Body, 1996).

Decreasing farm profitability and labour efficiencies from agricultural technology and mechanisation have changed rural employment. For example, the proportion of the Queensland workforce in agriculture has decreased from over 45% in the 1860s to 18% in 1961 and 5% today – a trend repeated in most western economies (Office of the Government Statistician, Queensland, 1999). Rural youth are opting for non-farm employment (Rousseaux, 2000). Since the late 1960s, farm succession within families in Britain has decreased from 75% of cases to less than half (Ward, 1996). Hart (1995) outlines similar shifts in the American rural economy.

Farmers are increasingly working off farm. Since 1984 off-farm earnings in Australia have risen from 24% of farm cash income to 68% (ABARE, 2000). Males et al. (1987) showed that on 60% of farms, farmers and their spouses earned off-farm income and that in most cases it was vital to the welfare of the family. This is consistent with trends in several other major OECD countries (OECD, 1978). In the U.S. for example, 37% of farmers work off the farm for more than 200 days a year (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990).

The Australian economy is fundamentally shifting from primary industries to a service and knowledge base. Total number of jobs increased by 17.3 % between 1986 and 1996. However, employment in agriculture and mining declined by 11.0% and 5.9% respectively. Over the same period, there were 30.9% more jobs in trade, finance, administration, retailing and services (Hugo, 2000). In Queensland for example, employment in services has almost doubled since 1960 to over 34% of all jobs (Figure 2). The shift to knowledge-based services has gone hand in hand with increasing education levels (ABS Censuses, 1986, 1996). The reality for agricultural employment is that since 1970, the number of families making a living from a farm has reduced by 100,000. A further reduction by up to 20% can be expected over the next ten years.

Australia is following the US trend where farming is losing its mainstay factor of most rural economies. In the USA, fewer than one fifth of rural counties now have a significant economic dependence on farming. The 20% of non metropolitan counties that have farming as their principal economic base contain less than 10% of the non metropolitan population (Keller, 2000b).

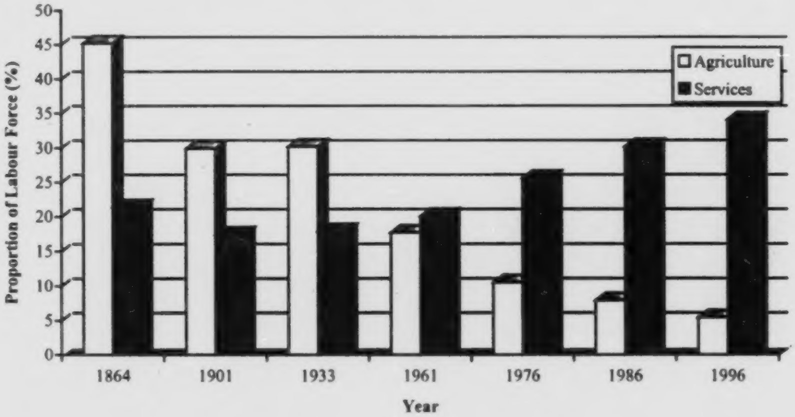

Figure 2. The shift in employment from agriculture to services* in Queensland from 1864 to 1996 (* Services consist of personal services, community services public administration, entertainment, restaurants, hotels, and defence). (Source: Office of the Government Statistician, Queensland, 1999).

Implications of the decline in agricultural sector employment are well summarised by Collits (2000:10) – *'The consequences for rural communities have been equally stark. The need for fewer farm workers has led to out-migration, the nature of the services provided to farms by the communities has changed and their level diminished, and the formerly close relationship between farms and rural communities has declined'.*

The implications of the interdependence of farming and their small service towns are also well summarised by Tonts (1996:24) in his study of the central wheatbelt of Western Australia - *'the economic, social and environmental changes which have affected Australia agriculture since the mid 1970s have given rise to increasing concern not only for the sustainability of family farming, but also the continuing viability of country towns'.*

Job loss in rural areas has also been just as dramatic in other sectors. In the last ten years, there has been a net loss of 66,000 regional railway jobs, and the last five years have seen the loss of over 10,000 rural bank jobs, almost solely due to loss of bank branches and staff positions due to the economic efficiencies of electronic banking (Kenyon, 1999). Asa Wahlquist has undertaken extensive research on service loss in rural Australia, and estimates that up to 30,000 jobs disappeared from regional New South Wales in the decade to 1999 (Wahlquist, 1999b).

There have been a number of specific factors operating within the Australian context. An analysis by the Australian Bankers Association (1998) indicates that towns which have experienced at least 20% population loss since 1976 tend to have had at least one of the following characteristics. They were:

- based on a depleted local mineral resource;
- based on local manufacturing in which advances in production methods have reduced the scale of the workforce required;
- based on a manufacturing activity that is no longer required in the local region;
- located in the wheat-sheep belt where there are natural economies of scale that have encouraged farm aggregation;
- located within a convenient drive time of a provincial city which offers services, employment, education and training;
- mining operations that have switched to fly-in, fly-out operations;
- located within a broader urban area which has experienced ageing of the local community of changing land use;
- physically isolated from the main highway systems; and
- formerly based on timber milling, small scale farming or with a narrow sphere of economic influence over its immediate region (ABA 1998:25-26).

The economic issues of personal income and debt also need comment. The downturn in farm income, together with internal immigration of low income groups, contributes to non-metropolitan areas having lower average incomes than urban Australia. The mean taxable income in non-metropolitan areas in 1996-7 was $28,599 – $4,200 less than in metropolitan areas (Hugo, 2000).

Rural debt is also growing. For example rural debt in Queensland has grown by 11% over the last five years (QRAA, 2000). Part of this increase was used to fund expansion and post-drought recovery. However, the proportion of borrowers in long term viable categories reduced by 12.6% and some authors doubt the ability of many rural businesses to service debt (McGovern, 1996; Reeve and Curthoys, 2000).

Finally, a major aspect of economic change is globalisation. Rural businesses now compete on global markets with worldwide exchange of information and capital. Global linkages are being driven by a revolution in telecommunications and information technology, the Internet, a gradual move towards free trade, increased participation in financial markets, and the opening of countries with the decline in communism (Department of Primary Industries, 2000).

For rural Australia, globalisation provides both advantages and drawbacks. Rural products can potentially gain access to a much wider market, rural businesses can be exposed to a wider range of investors, and business information and market intelligence from around the globe can be more rapidly shared (Jensen, 1998). However, rural businesses also face greater competition in existing and new markets. Consumers can also bypass local supplies and obtain goods and services direct from national or international suppliers. Salant and Marx (1995) argue that rural communities in the U.S. lack the infrastructure and capacity to derive a nett advantage from globalisation.

C. Social Change

Rural depopulation, reduced economic status, changing demographics and general changes in societal norms have contributed to a loss of social cohesion and community participation in rural areas. Outmigration and the decline of the family farm have dispersed social networks (Alston, 1994; Swanson, 1990; Wellman, 1979). The decline of family farming reduces social cohesion and community participation (Goldschmidt, 1978; Rodefield, 1974). The specific loss of young people deprives communities of a socially active group and potential leaders (Pretty, 1998).

Cavaye (1999) has also highlighted the impact of rural people developing economic and social links beyond their locality due to improved transport and communication means. Many small towns were created due to horse and train transport requirements. Today's car, telephone and internet have superimposed communication and travel patterns that allow rural people to shop, utilise services and participate in recreation well beyond the local community.

Consequently, many of the smaller communities struggle economically and socially against the regional centres which are now aptly described by Salt (2000) as 'sponge cities'. Factors at work include *'better transport and communications, diminishing links between farmers and their local communities, the regionalisation of services, and the preferences of consumers for wider choices in products and services'* (Collits 2000:9).

Wagga Wagga, New South Wales is a classic example. While it has grown 11 fold in population from 1900-2000 (including a 26% growth between 1981-96), small rural communities within 100kms continue to decline, eg, the Shires of Urana, Narrandera and Lockhart have lost 29%, 15% and 13% respectively of their population in the 1976-98 period (Salt, 2000).

One of the major social pressures is declining quality of life. Virtually every measure of the standard of living – income, health, education, aged care, access to services, infrastructure, housing – is stable or declining in rural Australia (Sidoti, 1998; Sarantakos, 1998). Australian researchers like Lawrence and Williams (1990) and Lawrence (1987) have argued that the problems associated with rural poverty are of a more chronic nature than in urban communities. Hill and Phillips (1991) contend that many rural residents are showing distinct signs of struggle and disadvantage.

Wahlquist (1998) claimed *'The Australian Newspaper has found that, by every significant measure, country Australians are worse off than their city cousins ... country people die younger and receive less medical attention, less education, and often inadequate telecommunication services'.* Several studies in the UK and USA have shown considerable increases in the incidence of rural poverty, large income disparities within similar geographic areas and the 'hidden' nature of rural poverty (Rural Development Commission, 1994; Duke of Westminster, 1992; Rural Sociological Society, 1993).

For many indigenous Australian residents of small towns, income levels, heath standards, employment rates, and civic participation continue to remain unacceptably low, and a source of continual frustration and challenge. Cross-cultural tension remans a strong and unresolved reality in many small towns.

An important part of the picture of rural Australia is that of the attitudes and emotional well being of rural people. Based on anecdotal evidence, many rural people are angry, frustrated and upset about low commodity prices, eroding rural infrastructure and services, and perceived lack of government attention. Cox (1995) highlighted the impact of social and economic changes on rural people and other sectors of society feeling marginalised, excluded and not in control of their future. Many rural people blame government and other external influences, some feel 'workshopped' and 'meetinged' out, and have strong expectations of government-sponsored assistance. People are also more cynical and less trusting of government (Time Magazine, 26/9/94).

Economic and social change is also placing enormous stress on individuals, families, relationships, social ties and community organisations (Kerby, 1992; McGregor et al., 1995; Lovelace, 1995). Increased suicide, and mental health problems in rural areas are closely linked to economic conditions (Viren, 1999), and declining social cohesion (O'Brien et al., 1994). These problems are highest in remote and deprived locations with low levels of social support (Hoyt et al., 1995). Shrapnel and Davie (2000) have postulated a process of 'natural selection' in rural areas for people with personalities characterised by tenacity and self reliance.

Finally, there have been a number of reports which have provided evidence about the negative impacts on small communities due to the contraction in health, education and banking services (Harrison, 1997, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1999, House of Representatives, 2000, Australian Bankers Association, 1998). The Australian Bureau of Statistics summarises the problems facing many small inland towns in Australia – '*People living in declining towns risk losing their savings, livelihood and support systems as they confront the break-up of their community, loss of jobs, deteriorating infrastructure and declining property values. In addition, declining towns often lose service through the closure of schools, hospitals, retail establishments and banks. Such closures have a direct impact on the health and well being of remaining residents, but they can also have psychological impact, with many seeing the closure of central services as signalling the 'death of a town'* (ABS 1998:10).'

D. Technological Change

Information technology also has dual impacts in rural areas. For example, the economic efficiencies of electronic banking have contributed to the loss of bank branches from rural towns (Beal and Ralston, 1998). Information technology (IT) also brings new opportunities to rural areas such as the possibility of internet sales, and greater access to information and services such as video-conferenced medical consultations. It also is stimulating innovative information-based employment opportunities in rural areas such as teleworking (Johnson, 1997; Huws et al., 1998). However, issues of line quality and speed of transmission in many rural areas continue to influence whether IT based businesses are viable.

E. Environmental Challenges

Increasingly, a variety of environmental challenges are impacting upon the quality of life of many small towns. Firstly, salinity and water quality are two of the most significant issues confronting rural communities and industries. Salinity currently affects 2.5 million hectares (5% of cultivated land). This figure could increase to 12 million hectares over the next 20 years and to 17 million hectares by 2050. Salinity threatens more than farming land. Currently over one third of rural river systems are adversely affected. Nearly 20,000 kilometres of road, 12,000 kilometres of streams and lakes, 306 towns and 80 important wetlands face degradation from salinity (Rose, 2000).

Water table levels in Western Australia's south west region are rising at 10 centimetres to 15 centimetres per year. According to Mark Pridman, Manager of the Small Towns Salinity Program of Agriculture WA, '*without any action, practically all the towns will be in trouble in 15 years*' (Laurie 2001:11).

Secondly, growing community (especially metropolitan population) concern over logging of natural forest areas has forced governments to restrict forestry operations and extend national parks. Consequently, forestry jobs have been lost, and many rural communities are obliged to examine new economic and employment options.

Thirdly, the recent growth of plantation forestry on cleared agricultural land has had a major impact upon the farming and small town community landscapes. In Western Australia alone, 28,000 hectares were planted in 1999.

Kelly (2000) estimates that 25% of the best land in some high rainfall parts of the State has changed from sheep and cattle to growing Tasmanian blue gums. Kelly's study found farm families benefiting from the sale or lease of land for plantations, but there had been a major negative impact at the community level in terms of population and infrastructure loss. She also found the transformation too rapid for many residents and that the new landscape contributed to a heightened sense of isolation.

F. Centralism and regionalism

Certainly the cumulative impact of government and business policies to regionalise and centralise services has contributed to the decline of smaller communities. The Productivity Commission regularly advocates removal of barriers to mobility of labour and capital to enhance 'people prosperity' over 'place prosperity'. This approach sees no intrinsic merit in 'maintaining' small towns if people and business are opting for larger centres (Collits, 1999).

For example, the Productivity Commission's report (1999) on competition policy in rural and regional areas states the impact of national competition policy is likely to lead to an estimated 2.6% job loss across wheatbelt Western Australia (Anthony, 1999).

Less obvious has been the attitudinal contribution by some government officials and academics in projecting a dying small town scenario and the complementary response of advocating the value of building regional centres.

New South Wales academic, Tony Sorensen, has talked about 'voluntary euthanasia' as a possible policy response to small town decline (quoted in Collits, 1999). Queensland academic Geoff Cockfield advocated that towns that were flood prone or expensive to service should be relocated (Collie, 1998). The most recent academic 'stir' emanated from Victorian academic Gordon Forth who advocated that government, in the interests of the community and the Australian society in general, instead of trying to prop up small communities (less than 4,000 in population) would be better off providing subsidies to people to move to larger regional centres (Forth, 2000, Countryman 2000). Such statements attract widespread media attention, and contribute to community stress levels (Kenyon, 2000c).

Demographic, economic, social, technological and attitudinal changes are transforming rural Australia. These pressures are long term fundamental trends, not just a temporary rural downturn. They are the culmination of shifts that have been occurring for decades – basic changes in the demand for rural products and in society itself.

They challenge rural people to limit the disadvantages of these shifts and capitalise on the opportunities they present. Many rural towns struggle to retain infrastructure and services. Yet at the same time, other communities are also responding with creative ways of retaining employment, diversifying their economy and optimising the use of their resources.

How then can small towns survive and prosper in the face of accelerating change? How can they remain vibrant centres of economic and social life? What are the elements or components of a resilient and vibrant community?

3. CONCEPT OF VIBRANT RURAL COMMUNITIES

Vibrance or resilience is not a fixed quality within communities – it can grow or decline. There is considerable international and national research and debate over the last twenty five years focussing on the common characteristics or outcomes of vibrant communities.

Lackey et al. (1987) summarised much of this debate up to the mid 1980s by suggesting seven characteristics:

- Local groups with well developed problem solving skills and a spirit of self reliance (Kaufman, 1959);
- Broadly distributed power, commitment to the community and wide participation in civic affairs (Warren, 1983);
- Leaders with vision and residents with a strong sense of community loyalty (Sanders, 1953);
- Collaboration and consensus on goals and priorities (Cottrell, 1983);
- Citizens with problem solving skills and the ability to acquire resources (Iscoe, 1974);
- Government that provides enabling support (Glick, 1983); and
- Ability to manage community conflict (Schoenberg and Rosenbaum, 1980).

Others generally support these characteristics (Goudy, 1977; Rutter, 1981; Heartland Center for Leadership Development, 1992). The Heartland Center (1992) has in fact expanded the list, and created their *'Twenty Clues to Rural Community Survival'* (see Information Sheet no 1) incorporating such characteristics as evidence of community pride, emphasis on quality in business and community life, willingness to invest in the future and acceptance of women into leadership roles.

Adams (1995) outlined the characteristics of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' communities by contrasting attributes such as optimism and cynicism, empowerment and apathy, interdependence and parochialism, the politics of substance and politics of personality (see Information Sheet no 2, '*What does a healthy community look like*?').

The Oklahoma Community Institute (1998) researching the concept of '*effective communities*' in the state of Oklahoma, USA, identified nine key characteristics that correspond strongly with Adams' list. Effective communities:

- educate the community in the community's business;
- view challenges as opportunities instead of seeing themselves as victims;
- are open to diversity of citizen involvement and perspective;
- create opportunities for open, respectful community dialogues;
- have leaders who listen more than they talk;
- are willing to share decision making;
- understand the concept of teamwork;
- aggressively work toward collaborative problem solving and consensus building; and
- seek win/win solutions to issues and problems.

There are other descriptions of vibrant communities that continue to focus on human and social capital. Lackey et al. (1987) provide the following concise summary:

- attitudes and values – a positive community vision and community pride;
- capacities – knowledge and skills, ability to perform functions;
- organisational arrangements that foster community participation; and
- leadership – shared community-wide leadership and skilled individual leaders.

There are various institutions and writers that generally concur with Lackey et al. The Aspen

Institute list eight *'outcomes of effective community capacity building'*, namely:

- expanding, diverse, inclusive citizen participation;
- expanding leadership base;
- strengthened individual skills;
- widely shared understanding and vision;
- strategic community agenda;
- consistent, tangible progression toward goals;
- more effective community organisation and institutions; and
- better resource utilisation by the community.

(for further expansion of these outcomes, see Information Sheet no 3).

The Center for Community Enterprise (1999) provides a *'portrait of community resilience'* listing twenty three characteristics that expand the Lackey et al. summary. The portrait includes such characteristics as belief in and support for education, openness to alternative economic activity, optimism about the future and diversified and representative leadership. See Information Sheet no 4 for a full summary.

Flora and Flora (1994) list eight characteristics of *'successful communities'*, namely:

- acceptance of controversy;
- ability to depersonalise politics;
- surplus income to invest;
- willingness to take risks;
- ability to define community more broadly;
- network ability;
- emphasis on academics; and
- flexible, dispersed leadership.

These characteristics are summarised in Information Sheet no 5.

'Healthy' and *'vibrant'* are often used as interchangeable concepts. The Coalition for Healthier Cities and Communities (1999:3) views health as more than just the absence of disease. *'It is an optimum state of well being ... Health is wholeness. It includes a sense of belonging to community and experiencing control over one's circumstances and fate... A healthy community is not a perfect place, but is in a dynamic state of renewal and improvement. It builds a culture that supports healthy life choices and a high quality of life...'*. Hancock and Duhl, quoted by the Coalition for Healthier Cities and Communities (1999:3) provide a similar interpretation of a healthy community, as one that is *'continually creating and improving those physical and social environments, and expanding those community resources which enable people to support each other in performing all the functions of life and in developing themselves to their maximum potential.'*

The Coalition for Healthier Cities and Communities is now a network of 450 organisations and more than 1,000 US communities that have actively embraced *'healthier community'* principles, processes and indicators.

The Coalition utilising their *Healthy Community Agenda Dialogue Guide* supported a US nationwide set of dialogues from March to November 1999. 4,000 people participated in one of 300 dialogues. The dialogues had two purposes. The first was to stimulate action at the local level in building healthier communities. Secondly, participants were asked to articulate a message to the nation about what they believed created health and improved quality of life.

From the responses the Coalition identified *'Seven Pillars of a Healthy Community'*. Such a community:

- shapes its future;
- cultivates leadership everywhere;
- creates a sense of community;
- connects people and resources;
- knows itself;
- practices ongoing dialogue; and
- embraces diversity.

A popular and current international concept for understanding a healthy community is that of social capital, made popular by Harvard University Professor Richard Putnam. Putnam during the course of a 20 year study of regional government in Italy found that the difference between regions that have prospered and those that had not is the quality and intensity of citizen involvement in the life of their communities (Putnam, 1993). His famous statement was *'these communities did not become civic simply* *because they were rich. The historical record strongly suggests precisely the opposite: they became rich because they were civic.'*

The key to creating prosperity, according to Putnam (1995:67) lies in the creation of social capital – *'those features of social organisation, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit'.* Social capital strengthens social well being and the sense of community, enhancing the benefits of investments in physical and human capital.

The Strengthening Communities Unit of the New South Wales Premier's Department has highlighted the importance of social capital in rural renewal: *'In rural communities struggling to remain viable in the face of major social and economic change, the presence or absence of social capital is a major factor in how well these communities can cope. Social capital is becoming more crucial and more threatened in declining communities. Rural communities are particularly being challenged to develop and use local social linkages to develop community-led responses. High levels of social capital indicate a high quality of life. This does not necessarily equate with a high level of income. If people feel safe, happy and secure, they will work together to organise and interact to build a stronger community'* (2000:9).

International research highlights that social capital is built from the ground up. It takes time to develop and needs particular and concrete attention. Citizens are more likely to become involved when they believe that their contribution will make a difference. They are more likely to support the efforts of others when they trust the integrity of the effort. They are more likely to undertake new projects if they believe projects succeeded in the past. As Putnam (1995) expresses it – *'successful collaborations in one endeavour builds connections in other, unrelated tasks. As with conventional capital, those who have social capital tend to accumulate more –them as has, gets!'* Social capital is a resource that grows and compounds when utilised, but dissipates and becomes depleted when not used.

Harrison (1998) in an analysis of the importance of social capital describes four themes that constitute a *'learning community'*, namely:

- the extent to which local people 'know' and feel that they 'belong' to their community;
- the extent of prior and current experience of community members;
- having a rich human resource base including practical, business, communication, pragmatic and energising qualities; and
- interaction and 'learning exchange' within the community.

US Economic Developer, Ron Shaffer, provides a useful picture of an economically viable community – *'Viability is the ability to survive and to pursue the face of changing circumstances. Community economic viability is the capacity of local socio-economic systems to generate employment and income to maintain, if not improve, the community's relative economic position. Economically viable communities possess the capacity to perceive changing socio-economic circumstances and to respond appropriately. Community viability has political, social, physical dimensions'* (Shaffer 1990:75).

Shaffer (1989a) identifies four key attributes of viability, namely:

- a state of resilience;
- creativity and innovativeness;
- ability and willingness to experiment; and
- a desire and power to begin and complete useful projects.

The term *'community sustainability'* is increasingly being used as a means of describing how positive change can be generated and managed. The idea of sustainable development was popularised by the 1987 Brundtland Report emanating from the World Commission on Environment and Development. Sustainable development was defined as *'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'*.

Much of the initial work on sustainability focused on global population, development, equity and environmental issues. Increasingly, many development organisations and communities are exploring what sustainability means for them in specific, local terms. Sustainability is being viewed as an umbrella concept that can assist in dealing in a comprehensive manner with the related goals of building healthy communities, promoting economic vitality, protecting the environment, managing change and enhancing the well being of community residents.

Bauen et al. (1996) and Hart (1999) have been instrumental in getting US communities to think more holistically about the relationships between economy, community and environment at the local level. They have developed a series of sustainable principles and indicators[2]. See Information Sheet no 6.

Here in Australia, the Strengthening Communities Unit of the New South Wales Premier's Department through their Sustainable Rural Communities (SRC) Project has pioneered exciting initiatives in terms of *'community sustainability'*. The Project Handbook (2000:17) uses the following definition – *'Sustainable communities maintain and improve their social, economic and environmental characteristics so that residents can continue to lead healthy, productive and enjoyable lives. Sustainable development in these communities is based on the understanding that a healthy environment and a healthy economy are both necessary for a healthy society'*.

The project advocates rural communities investigating their future potential through the lens of sustainability. It has developed a very helpful set of *'Ten Characteristics of Sustainable Rural Communities'* (see Information Sheet no 7) plus ten tools to enable communities to research and analyse specific factors in a community to assess its level of sustainability.

Finally, the recent work of the Bank of IDEAS (2000) in Australia and the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (2000) in the USA provide a summary of many of the common themes. The Bank of IDEAS from its work with over 500 Australian and New Zealand communities have developed contrasting characteristics of a healthy vibrant community and a stagnant dying community. It focuses on visuals, attitudes, economics and civic participation (see Information Sheet no 8).

The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development engaged in a process of asking mid west US rural communities to name *'the outcomes associated with community success'*. The communities consistently named five types of outcomes, and they provide a useful and concluding portrait of a vibrant community, namely:

- increased use of the skills, knowledge and ability of local people;
- strengthened relationships and communication;
- improved community initiative, responsibility and adaptability;
- sustainable, healthy ecosystems with multiple community benefits; and
- appropriately diverse and healthy economies.

How then can small communities become more vibrant? How can they develop leadership, infrastructure, attitudes and organisation to be better able to survive and prosper? This requires an understanding of the issues associated with small town renewal and the application of community and economic development processes.

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[2] Indicators are benchmarks or measurements that provide feedback to a community to help it assess its current condition and the direction in which it is moving.

4. THE PROCESS OF SMALL TOWN RENEWAL

A. Definition

Rural renewal involves a sustained and united effort by the whole community to improve their local economy, quality of life and future options. It represents a process of planning, action, organisation and learning where community residents enhance and balance the local economic viability, community well being and environmental health of their community (Cavaye, 2000, Kenyon 1999, Bauen et al. 1996, Hart 1999, Center for Community Enterprise 1999). It is about local people taking responsibility for their preferred future.

It is about communities and their residents utilising their human, physical and financial resources to maintain or enhance local development opportunities and their quality of life. (Kenyon, 1999). It involves processes of identifying and harnessing community resources and opportunities to stimulate sustainable development (Municipal Association of Victoria 1994a).

Rural renewal is a process that increases choices. It focuses on new options, diversification, thinking about issues differently and anticipating change (Christensen et al., 1989). It is also often about communities changing perceptions and choices regarding development options, community resources, markets, rules and decision making capacity (Shaffer, 1989a; Kenyon 1999).

B. Principles/process ingredients

Rural renewal is about sustainable development which stands in sharp contrast to conventional, business-at-any-cost economic development strategies. Kinsley (1997) sees the process of sustainable development as one which:

- redefines prosperity, weighing quality of life, community character, and the environment alongside economic considerations;
- seeks true development, in the sense of getting better, instead of expansion, which is merely getting bigger;
- advocates the long term stewardship of community resources, ensuring that present actions do not erode the basis for future prosperity.
- pursues self reliance and a more democratic approach to decision making, representing community wide interests over those of an elite few; and
- stresses diversity, resilience, and a conviction that many small efforts work better than a single one-size-fits-all solution.

Likewise, the Municipal Association of Victoria (1994a) advocates a process that:

- focuses on the stimulation of opportunities that will generate additional income and jobs, while preserving and hopefully enhancing the dynamics and features that make the local community special;
- seeks more resilient, durable and diversified local economies;
- encourages development processes compatible to local aspirations, needs, values and resources; and
- emphasises a holistic approach to development;

There is no 'recipe' to be followed for rural renewal. Rather, a set of principles, applied appropriately, guides a flexible process of engagement and action. Cavaye (2000) outlined one set of key development principles namely:

- the existing concerns and situation of people are the starting point of community development;
- community development creates a vehicle for people to act on existing concerns;
- the passion and enthusiasm of local people drives action and people build motivation and community capacity through participation;
- there is community ownership/involvement – the community makes and implements decisions, and the community's initiative and leadership are the source of change;
- all citizens are given an equal opportunity to be involved - a diversity of opinion and perspective is welcomed;
- external facilitators and resource people are 'invited in' to work with rural people;
- development activities foster leadership, entrepreneurship and altruism;
- there is an appreciation of existing community capacity;
- a holistic approach is used, building economic, human, social and environmental aspects of community as an interrelated whole;
- community development helps the process of 'reframing' whereby people redefine problems and opportunities and discover new options;
- changed attitudes and networks are as important as material outcomes; and
- success, no matter how small, is recognised and celebrated.

Tosterud (1998) concurs generally with these principles with his eleven 'premises of development'. Shaffer (1989a), National Business Initiative (1996) and the Centre for Small Town Development (1997) all provide a remarkably similar set of 'ingredients'.

The National Business Initiative in South Africa in their manual *Taking the Lead* (1996) advocate the following as key ingredients for renewal:

- Vision, passion, self-reliance and a 'can do' spirit;
- Ownership and involvement by a united community;
- Capable and respected local leadership;
- Awareness and use of outside resources, skills and support services;
- Adoption of a practical development agenda which focuses on realistic goals, early achievements and long term plans;
- Commitment to partnerships, cooperation and a shared vision;
- Use of organisations, credible structures and processes that make things happen; and
- Community entrepreneurism and opportunism.

See Information Sheet no 8 for a summary of these eight ingredients.

A very similar set of ingredients was produced by the Municipal Association of Victoria (1994b) in their manual *Survival and Revival in Rural Communities*:

- Belief and expectation;
- Collaboration;
- Local leadership;
- Strategic planning and action; and
- Opportunism.

The Centre for Small Town Development (1997) has published their *Twenty Clues to Creating and Maintaining a Vibrant Community*. This appears as Information Sheet no 10 and incorporates such ingredients as:

- Passionate local people;
- Positive community mindset;
- Shared community vision;
- Local business vitality;
- Practical development agenda; and
- Forging of partnership.

C. Specific Process Elements

National and international literature consistently stresses the importance of five aspects of the renewal process.

Firstly, **an expression of healthy frustration with the status quo, and a willingness to explore and experiment with developing innovative solutions and options.** McCall (1993:1) used the phrase '*we need new ideas and new spirits'*. Shaffer (1990:76-77) maintains that a *'slight level of dissatisfaction'* and '*a* *positive attitude toward experimentation'* are two essential prerequisites for renewal. The first aspect of dissatisfaction stresses the unwillingness of local economic actors to accept current conditions as immutable, and acknowledges that until people are sufficiently dissatisfied with current conditions they are not likely to respond. A *'positive attitude toward experimentation'* implies that the community does not limit its actions to what worked previously or under other circumstances. It underlines the necessity of the community to support and encourage those individuals who generate non-traditional ideas and solutions.

Secondly, **the demonstration of positive mindset, passion and opportunism**. The Heartland Center for Leadership Development (1992;6) used the phrase *'conviction that in the long run, you have to do it yourself'*. The Municipal Association of Victoria (1994a:18) advocated the concept of *'belief and expectation'*, and *'a conviction that the community needs to take its own action, rather than waiting for the cavalry to come'*. Shaffer (1990:85) stated that *'economically viable communities believe that they, and they alone, control or make their own destiny regardless of local and national circumstances'*. The Centre for Small Town Development (1997) referred to such intangibles as:

- a positive community mindset that focuses on optimism, belief, expectation, hope and 'talks up' the community;
- a 'can do' self reliant spirit – the belief that one's economic and social destiny lies in the community's hands; and
- opportunism.

Powell (quoted in Derriman, 1999:1) argues that the entrepreneurial flair of local people is likely to determine each town's fate – *'nowadays towns are really not so different from businesses, they need to keep recreating themselves. Not so many years ago country towns were subject to general trends. They would all do well or all do badly. The picture now is very uneven. The successful towns are likely to be driven by people who are passionate and creative, who see an opportunity and go for it. You need communities with a bit of get up and go spirit. Some have it, some don't'*.

Thirdly, **the use of appropriate community planning and development processes**. US literature in particular, highlights the importance that such processes plays in building the capacity of a community and assisting it to formulate and implement plans that merge social and economic goals. See, for example, Ayres et al. (1990), Heartland Center for Leadership Development (1992), Littrell (1995), National Center for Small Communities (1997), Oklahoma Community Institute (1997), Kinsley (1997), The Aspen Foundation (1996), North Central Regional Center for Rural Development 1998).

Many authors outline a sequence of stages in a development process. The common elements of most can be summarised into a process that consists of four general phases, namely:

- Where are we now? – collecting and analysing information about the current situation of the community.
- Where do we want to go? – creating a community vision, prioritising issues to be addressed, developing specific goals for community action.
- How can we get there? – organising task groups, establishing leadership and responsibilities, making specific plans, implementing and monitoring action plans.
- How do we know we have arrived? – review and evaluation, celebration of success, planning for reinvestment or new projects.

Information Sheets numbered 12, 13 and 14 provide three examples of this approach – Oklahoma Community Institute *Planning Model* (1997), The Rocky Mountain Institute's, *Eight Steps to Economic Renewal* (Kinsley, 1997), and *Participatory Process to Build Healthy Communities* (New Mexico Healthier Communities Project, 1999).

While the above appears a linear process, community development is a complex, interactive learning process involving an ongoing interplay between planning, action, reflection and negotiation. In effect, community development is a constant process – while specific initiatives start and finish, community development is continuous process of collective improvement and enhancement.

Australian authors like Kenyon (1996), Municipal Association of Victoria (1994a) and McArdle (1998) provide many of the tools of community development, consistent with the above phases. Cavaye (2000) outlines a detailed generic process of community development.

Other approaches focus community action on building various aspects of community capacity such as leadership, human resources, community organisation, local institutions as well as economic development (Aspen Institute, 1996; Burgess, 1996).

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) and McKnight and Kretzmann (1990) focus community development on the enhancement of community assets. They recommend a process that involves:

- community 'mapping' of local assets (individual, organisational, institutional);
- identifying or forming an 'asset development organisation' to conduct a community development process;
- implementing a process of community decision making and action; and
- building links to outside organisations.

Other suggested processes rely on a specific community encourager or facilitator (University of Kentucky, 1997; Sirolli, 1998). A Rural Innovation Model takes a systems approach to community participation and issues identification (Van Beek, 1999).

In summary, common elements of the process that most authors encourage include:

- creation of a shared vision of the best community future;
- broad based participation, with representation from a cross-section of community interests and points of view – commitment to inclusiveness, and a high level of community involvement;
- idea generation by reaching 'wide and deep' into the community – in particular the use of action/research strategies for collecting information about the community, analysing available data and demystifying its relevance to community members;
- thinking and reflection outside normal boundaries and boxes that are familiar;
- structured sequential planning that enables participants and the community to identify opportunities, prioritise actions and understand who is doing what and when;
- focus on the community's assets, rather than deficiencies;
- starting with the achievable, and moving to the important;
- long term orientation and commitment;
- planning and action occurring simultaneously;
- realistic appraisal of the feasibility of potential opportunities;
- use of limited time and resources in those areas that will yield the greatest strategic benefits;
- benchmarking and measurement of progress and outcomes, with adjustment of action steps on a regular basis; and
- regular celebration of achievements.

A statement by the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (2000:3) summarises well the significance of appropriate community planning and development processes – *'a community that is responsible for its own future shares a well-crafted and widely considered vision for the future, turns it into reality through strategic local action, and makes changes when conditions or assumptions change. A community that monitors and documents the results of its actions, and that regularly reflects on its progress and barriers, learns from its experience. It becomes more resilient, more capable of adapting to change, and better able to improve its efforts and sustain itself over time'*.

Fourthly, **the implementation of a comprehensive and locally owned and resourced local economic development agenda**.

The concept of local economic development is highlighted in most studies. The Municipal Association of Victoria (1994a:5) defines it as '*a process of identifying and harnessing local community resources and opportunities, to stimulate economic and employment activity*'. Kenyon (1999:9) refers to the '*community effort to improve their local economy and quality of life by building their capacity to adapt to and benefit from global economic changes*'. Shaffer

(1990:75) refers to community economic vitality as *'the capacity of the local socio-economic system to survive and persist in generating employment, income, and wealth and to maintain, if not improve its relative economic position'*.

Aspects of this process ingredient include:

- focus on initiatives that build and balance economic vitality, community wellbeing and the health of the environment (Hart 1999, Bauen et al., 1996). The Centre for Community Enterprise refers to taking *'a multi functional approach to create a sustainable (economically, ecologically, politically and socially) development system within the community'* (2000:1);
- use of holistic frameworks for economic renewal. For example, Kinsley (1997) advocates four key and interactive elements of economic renewal, namely:
  - plug the leaks in the local economy;
  - support existing business;
  - encourage new local enterprise; and
  - recruit compatible new businesses.

The Bank of IDEAS (1997) in their framework for development advocate a similar list which is summarised as Information Sheet no 11. Luke et al. (1988:236) provide a useful description of the holistic approach required – *'the tendency is to think in terms of industrial attraction or downtown revitalization or tourism or high-tech, rather than to consider all parts in relation to one another. Successful economic development requires the difficult task of 'wrapping one's mind around the word'.*' Both Kinsley (1997) and the Bank of IDEAS also stress that sustainable development does not result from any 'quick fix' measure. It involves developing a mix of initiatives related to the community's competitive advantages, namely:

- formulation and implementation of a practical development agenda which includes bite size and medium to long term initiatives;
- importance of diversification in terms of economic and employment options with an openness to alternative economic activities;
- strategies for increasing local ownership;
- commitment to local investment; and
- awareness and smart use of outside resources;

Local investment is a strong theme of much of the literature on rural renewal. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), The Centre for Community Enterprise (2000) and Kenyon (1999) stress the need for local people to invest locally and for strategies to increase local ownership. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993:5) have summarised this aspect well – *'all the historic evidence indicates that significant community development only takes place when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort. That's why you can't develop communities from the top down, or from the outside in'*.

Fifthly, **the presence and continuous renewal of local leadership**. The most important finding of the 1994 McKinsey Report regional development in Australia was that the success of rural economic development depends to a large extent on the commitment, quality and energy of business and community leadership. Their famous statement was '*Given the task of rejuvenating a region and the choice of $50 million, or $2 million and 20 committed local leaders, we would chose the smaller amount of money and the committed leaders*' (McKinsey, 1994:8).

This reflects US experience – '*the most critical factor in determining the growth of rural communities is leadership, the most critical investment to ensure the future of rural America is leadership education'* (Glen Pulver, Professor Emeritus, Rural Development, University of Wisconsin, Madison, quoted in Rural Development News, March 1993). A similar comment from the Heartland Center for Leadership Development (1992:5) – *'Heartland Center research has shown again and again how important the attitude of the community is in determining survival. Leadership is the key to maintaining the community's attitude. Communities that resist change, ignore new opportunities, focus on threats and refuse to take any risks are in serious trouble.*'

The Centre for Small Town Development (1997) identified the importance of the *'presence of local leadership/champions committed to local development efforts'*, *'the continual development and renewal of leadership'* and *'a* *group of passionate local people who are committed to spending the time, energy and other resources it will take to make positive local change a reality'.*

Epps and Sorensen (1995) through their work in Queensland on the nature of community leadership identified four key leadership functions, namely to:

- formulate a realistic vision of the community's economic and social development;
- achieve a high level of community acceptance of, if not active commitment to, the vision;
- motivate key community business-persons, administrators and social activists to work systematically and in a coordinated way towards the vision; and
- lead by example.

In their study '*Grassroots Leaders for a New Economy*', Henton et al. (1997) focus on the concept of 'civic entrepreneurship', and believe today's world requires more collective and collaborative leadership skills than the old individual charismatic leadership models. Communities that prosper practice collaborative problem solving and consensus based decision, and have leadership committed to these behaviours. This is particularly relevant for rural communities.

According to Henton et al. (1997:34), civic entrepreneurs are not afraid of failure, and have vision, courage and energy, and displaying five key traits, namely:

- they see opportunity in the new economy;
- they possess an entrepreneurial personality;
- they provide collaborative leadership to connect the economy and the community;
- they are motivated by broad, enlightened, long term interests; and
- they work in teams, playing complementary roles.

Henton et al. believe civic entrepreneurs are essentially community change agents and that this requires 'multiple talents'. It is leadership for the long haul – '*They lead their communities through fundamental change and improvement processes that have no quick fixes.*' (1997:52).

Leadership development and renewal are a commonly stated ingredients of rural renewal. Commitment to the expansion of the local leadership base and the continual influx of new people into decision making opportunities is essential. The Coalition for Healthier Cities and Communities (1999:13) summarises this characteristic as leadership everywhere, while Flora and Flora (1994:34) use the phrase '*flexible dispersed leadership*'. In particular, the mobilisation, skill development and active involvement of women and young people have been highlighted in a number of studies (Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1998, Centre for Small Town Development 1997). The Heartland Center for Leadership Development (1992:5) within their list of Twenty Clues to Rural Community Survival specifically identify '*acceptance of women in leadership roles*' and '*deliberate transfer of power to a younger generation of leaders*'.

Finally, **the practice of healthy community behaviours**. International and national literature stresses several aspects of this dimension. One is the issue of collaboration and inclusiveness or what Shaffer (1989) describes as '*a high level of intra-community discussion*'. The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (2000:5) speaks of '*strengthened relationships and strong communication patterns*'. Sanzone (1993:11) notes that '*the success of a local development strategy will rest on a long time commitment by a sustained coalition of local public officers, the private sector, and citizen groups*'.

A second aspect of healthy community behaviours is what Flora (2000:2-3) refers to as a high level of legitimisation of alternatives – '*different points of view within the community are both accepted and valued by others in the community. This leads to the acceptance of controversy, which is different from conflict. Where there is conflict, lines are drawn in the sand and one is labelled according to one's stance on a particular issue. When everything appears smooth and everyone agrees on everything, no discussion occurs. New issues are not brought forward, visions of the future are not shared, and alternative ways of getting there are not developed. In this situation, conflict often lies right beneath the surface. Controversy, however, is the opposite of conflict. Acceptance of controversy means that people* *can disagree with each other and still respect each other. In communities that accept controversy, there is depersonalization of politics. Ordinary citizens are more likely to run for public office, and feel able to implement countermeasures to resolve community issues without being crucified.'*

A third aspect of healthy community behaviour is the need for communities to link and collaborate with other communities and with organisations, enterprises and agencies outside the community (Aspen Institute, 1996). Flora and Flora (1994:34) term this as *'the ability to define community more broadly'* – *'a successful community will reach outside itself to the surrounding community, the region, the state and even the world. Communities must realise they are part of the global community and that partnership within the region and the state can provide benefits locally'*. Effective rural development will also require communities to be smart users of outside resources.

D. Conclusion

There is a wealth of international and national literature on themes associated with rural community renewal. Collits (2000) provides a useful local summary of key process factors when listing the success factors emanating from an analysis of Mainstreet/Small Towns Program of the New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development.

- community ownership of the planning process;
- commitment to working in partnership with other local organisations;
- commitment to funding the program locally;
- local council support and involvement;
- an active committee with broad representation from local government, business and community groups;
- local leadership;
- broad community support for the local program;
- knowing the local economy;
- focussing on the retention and expansion of existing businesses rather than attempting to attract large employers;
- a realistic strategic plan developed through a public consultation process;
- detailed action plans;
- a human resource commitment to implementing the strategic plan;
- monitoring progress and ongoing evaluation;
- keeping people informed, particularly through positive media coverage; and
- acknowledging and celebrating success.

Section V below outlines the case studies of fourteen Australia small towns that have actively engaged in the processes of rural community renewal. Their stories and observations by local participants provide a remarkable endorsement of these factors.

5. AUSTRALIAN SMALL TOWN RENEWAL CASE STUDIES

Small Town Renewal
Change the future of your community

Throughout rural Australia, there are various illustrations of small inland towns which have demonstrated that the ability to survive and thrive is not based on location, weather, proximity to the coast or a regional centre, but more related to attitude, local leadership and local action.

Below are the stories of 14 vibrant small communities, drawn from each State within Australia. They are:

- Balingup, south west Western Australia
- Beechworth, north east Victoria
- Boonah, south east Queensland
- Burra, mid north South Australia
- Coolah, central west New South Wales
- Deloraine, north east Tasmania
- Donald, Wimmera, Victoria
- Gulargambone, central west New South Wales
- Harrow, Western Districts, Victoria
- Hyden, Wheatbelt Western Australia
- Kulin, Wheatbelt Western Australia
- Mitchell, western Queensland
- Oatlands, Southern Midlands, Tasmania
- Tumby Bay, Eyre Peninsula, South Australia

The selected case studies are all towns with less than 3,500 residents. The majority have a population of less than 1,000 people. Each town has its own story, and its set of ingredients that made positive local development possible. Despite their achievements, none of the communities would claim they have reached that state where the can 'relax their guard', and assume all will be well – renewal is definitely a continuous journey, not a destination. Despite their unique circumstances, size and location, there are some remarkable similarities. A number of themes appear common to the renewal of most if not all of the following stories, namely:

- **Right timing** – timing and circumstances appears important in the process for many towns including:
    - local residents recognising that *'something must be done and that no one else will do it'*
    - often the occurrence of a wake up call or crisis, eg, closure of major employer, withdrawal of a service, negative publicity etc.
    - local people coming together to discuss and seek a better future.
- **Use of community planning processes** – to formalise thinking, planning and action about their assets, needs, preferred future, and prioritised actions.
- **Enthusiastic local champion(s) and leadership** – having at least one influential and skilled local person or group actively and enthusiastically promoting the concept of renewal and providing the leadership for action.
- **Positive attitude** – positive belief in the community and its future, and the expectation that deliberate steps could be undertaken to enhance existing activities or develop new options and pathways for the community and its residents.
- **Local entrepreneurism** – existence of local people and groups providing leadership and example in terms of civic and/or business entrepreneurism and opportunity obsession.
- **Local investment** – willingness by locals to contribute towards the financial resources to make positive change occur.
- **Smart use of outside resources** – awareness of, and access to the technical and

financial resources to assist project development. All the communities have been successful in cultivating allies, actively seeking information, networking with outside supporters and securing outside funding.

- **New community networks** – that actively support new ideas, new thinking and new ways of working together.
- **Youth focus** – attention being given to the key issues affecting the retention of young men and women, including employment diversity, education options, transport, accommodation, lifestyle, image and participation.

Each community has a unique journey that needs telling individually. Collectively they provide wonderful illustrations of both the processes necessary, and the outcomes possible for small town renewal.

Each case study incorporates extensive use of quotations by local people drawn from consultations in each community, and dialogues with a host of players who have contributed to the renewal process.

Small Town Renewal
Gilgandra Weekly
Gulargambone making history
BALINGUP
Boonah tops the
$1500
Change the future of your community

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A. Balingup,
Western Australia

Balingup (population 525) is regarded by many as one of Western Australia's most attractive towns. Situated 238 kms south of Perth, the historic village of Balingup nestles in a picturesque valley, situated on the inland South Western Highway between the towns of Donnybrook and Bridgetown. Its transformation as a community from the late 1960s is a most remarkable and interesting story.

ALINGUP
17 27

Settled as early as 1859 by one of the State's most famous pastoralists and philanthropists, Walter Padbury, Balingup was declared a townsite in 1898. Population at that time was 250 people. By the 1930s, it was a thriving farming community with strong business and civic infrastructure. The district population reached its zenith in 1959 with 1,347 residents (Frost, 1979: 57). It boasted its own Shire Council, a cheese factory, timber mill, several major company fruit packing sheds and a full range of retail businesses. Its annual open tennis tournament was a key feature of the State's tennis world, and regularly attracted national tennis champions, while its strong sporting organisations provided regular representation in state teams. It was also the home of the famous regional 'Black and White Band'.

However from the early 1960s, Balingup began to experience dramatic decline in population and services. The dairy quota system coupled with the districts steep terrain combined to make the dominant activity of dairy farming unviable. The pine growing value of the district simultaneously attracted the interest of the state forestry department who began offering attractive terms to the farmers to leave their land, and the wholesale conversion of the district to pine plantations began. From 1959 to 1973, 34 properties (including several historic properties) involving almost 10,000 hectares were purchased by the Forestry Department. Population declined dramatically and the new plantation land ceased to be rateable, making the Shire's rate base non viable.

The Minister for Local Government used a round of council amalgamations in 1969/70 to force the community's incorporation into a new Donnybrook-Balingup Shire Council. The annoyance and frustration of the community was captured well by the town's historian, Alan Frost – '*the final meeting of the Shire Council was held on March 27 when it was resolved "that the Council register strong protest at the high handed and dictatorial methods of the Minister for Local Government and departmental officers in the manner in which the Shire had been amalgamated with Donnybrook". And as a final act of protest Councillors stood in silence for two minutes "for the death of a virile and active shire brought about by the undemocratic actions of the Minister and his staff"*'.

With the establishment of Donnybrook, (30 kms away), as the major centre for civic and commercial services, the decline in Balingup accelerated. The final straw was the closure of the town's cheese factory in 1976.

However, the mid 1970s also saw the beginning of certain positive developments – the influx of settlers from the city had begun, attracted to the beauty and seeking an alternative lifestyle. These new settlers brought new skills and crafts, and reinterpreted the beauty and uniqueness of the district. From their ranks emerged a fierce determination to build on the community's magnificent natural beauty, and a commitment to the natural environment. This new wave of settlement also saw diversification of the community's economic base, and the creation of new and interesting businesses. While today there are only four full-time farmers in the boundaries of the old Shire of Balingup, the Balingup community is a vibrant economic centre.

Today their pride and vision are captured in the opening words of their submission to Progress Rural WA as 'A Most Enterprising rural Community' – '*Balingup is, beyond doubt, the centre of the universe. It is a town of tremendous vitality, creativity, enterprise and sense of community. Our community vision is one of wealth and celebration; we celebrate the wealth of our natural environment, its rolling hills, misty mornings and abundance of both native and deciduous trees; the richness of a lively, diverse and active community; a wealth of talent and creativity in all fields of the arts and in the practice of alternative, ecologically sound farming practices. The place itself has an intrinsic quality that drew us all here and then worked on us to call forth the very best we can give.*'

Historic steps in the community's positive transformation have included the following:

- From the mid 1970s: the rapid introduction into the district of new settlers with idealism, new business ideas, a deep commitment to the environment and community development – the establishment of the Universal Brotherhood Commune in December 1975 and the conversion of the derelict Cheese Factory in 1977 to an impressive art and craft complex by two senior ex-Canberra bureaucrats symbolised the process that continues today.
- 1979 - the formation of the Balingup Progress Association as a vehicle for community development.
- 1980 - the historic farm 'Golden Valley' on the outskirts of the town was planted with pines. Balingup residents protested and subsequently a Community and Forestry Department Committee was established to form and manage the Golden Tree Park – a beautiful attraction with trees from all over the world for both locals and visitors. This initiative gave the community an early win, and an illustration of their capacity to organise and achieve.
- From 1985 – the community took the initiative to rationalise its deteriorating sporting pavilions, by creating one recreation centre. In the process, the community over a ten year fund raising process totally paid for the building. It is the centre for a range of indoor sports, home of a number of clubs and the location for regular community meal nights.
- July 1988 – the Balingup Progress Association organised a Community Planning Day facilitated by Jane Manning (Coordinator, Small Town Self Help Program of the WA Department of Employment and Training) to identify the employment, training and economic needs of the Balingup district. This event attracted 85 residents, and identified major areas for development related to education, a community centre, home and community care service, the horticulture and agriculture industry, accommodation, recycling, health, tourism and workspace. Many initiatives over the following decade had their origins in this event.
- May 1989 – work began on the relocation of the old Forestry buildings for the purpose of creating a workspace and community centre complex. This was the result of a task group emanating from the community planning day. The Centre has benefited from numerous government grants. It provides the home for a variety of community and business groups.
- April 1991 – the first Small Farm Field Day was held to showcase the districts distinctive culture and sustainable agricultural base. The event's creation was a direct outcome of the Horticulture and Agriculture Industry workshop group established at the community planning event. This event has been held every year since, and attracts on average 8,000 visitors, 200 exhibitors and 250 stalls. The substantial profits generated are utilised for the benefit of the community (over a ten year period $90,000 has been provided for a variety of community projects). It is a day of education, information, innovation, celebration and inexpensive non commercial entertainment.
- 1997 – Balingup achieved national prominence by becoming Western Australia's first Aussie Host Town – where every business adopted the national 'Aussie

Host' customer service program.

- 1997 – Balingup created another successful and celebratory occasion, the Balingup Carnivale – Medieval Afayre and Tulip Festival. This event began as a Landmark Education Self Expression and Leadership Program project – a street parade to celebrate the creative community – and has exploded in both scale and vision. In 2000 over 400 local people became involved in the event (including the 86 students at the local school who constructed and operated a 30 metre silk dragon). Profits generated are targeted at training and employment initiatives, and the project creator, Ros Benson, is hopeful the event's experiences will lead to the creation of a community business in areas like mask and costume design, construction and hire, and special functions. The event was motivated by the fact that local business traders identified August as a poor trading month. This event now attracts up to 6,000 people and has made August the best financial month for local businesses!
- 1998 – Balingup formed a Youth Advisory Committee to focus on the needs of young people and provide a vehicle for young people to instigate community initiatives.
- 1999 – the Balingup and District Tourist Association was formed, and has now established an Information Centre. Staffed by volunteers and operational seven days a week.
- 2000 – another Community Workshop facilitated by Peter Cumins gave the community opportunity to think and plan the future growth of Balingup, and how to manage the inevitable question of subdividing rural land. A Balingup Community Plan has eventuated which the Donnybrook-Balingup Council has endorsed and incorporated into its Rural Strategy.
- Other initiatives which have contributed to the transformation of Balingup include:
  - formation of a Townscape Committee and use of the Tidy Towns Competition to enhance local gardens and appearance;
  - founding of the Balingup-Donnybrook Home and Community Care Service
  - identity creation of Balingup as the 'place where they have all those scarecrows' – metal scarecrows form impressive town entrance statements, and the annual competition results in up to 70 scarecrows adorning the district;
  - local winemakers competitions and events;
  - use of Federation funding to create an interesting tourist information bay and tourist shelter;
  - development of a town strategic plan.

Locals and community development personnel have identified a number of factors that have contributed to the positive transformation of Balingup, namely:

- **Influx of a group of creative and idealist new settlers**. From the mid 1970s, many city people have been attracted to the beauty and energy of Balingup. They have brought a range of community and entrepreneurial skills, which has seen both the creation of new enterprises and employment, and their mobilisation for community initiatives. The reuse of old buildings and the presence of businesses with national markets are testimony to the creativity of new settlers. The community has developed a positive reputation for its welcome of new settlers, and its strong sense of inclusion.
- **Development balance**. Balingup's development has always involved that creative tension of finding the right balance between economic vitality, environment health and community well being. Their Small Farm Day is a celebration of all three, and highlighting the benefits that accrue from the practice of sustainable development principles and procedures.
- **The importance of the community planning event**. The Community Planning Day in 1988 holds the origins of much that has occurred in Balingup over the last decade. In the words of the facilitator of that event, Jane Manning – *'the Small Town Self Help Program held in Balingup in 1988 was the catalyst which mobilised the community. The priorities identified on the Community Planning Day and subsequent initiatives have been achieved through many hours of planning, volunteer labour and commitment*

of a wonderful core group of Balingup residents who have persevered in their endeavours to develop and maintain a sustainable economy for their community'. (Manning, 1994: 23). Helen Christensen captured the importance of the planning event – *'It was a day that drew together Old Balingup, New Balingup and Alternative Balingup. Because the workshop was so well attended, the outcomes were endorsed by the community as a whole'*.

- **Positive attitude**. Balingup is a community that believes strongly in a positive future, and its ability to achieve it. The long list of achievements over the last decade is a testimony to this spirit. In addition, this spirit is complemented by a celebratory approach that seeks consistently to highlight and rejoice in the creativity and diversity of their community.
- **Knowledge and use of outside resources**. Balingup has been very successful in identifying appropriate technical and financial support. In particular, the long term personal commitment, passion and skill of Jane Manning, a government regional development facilitator has been invaluable, and highlights the advantage of having a champion within the bureaucracy.
- **High stocks of social capital**. The level and intensity of resident involvement within their community and its activities has always been very strong and valued in Balingup. It has been 'the glue' that holds together and invigorates the community. The mass participation of the local community in events like Carnivale Medieval Afayre is an illustration of the level of the community's social capital. The level of social capital in Balingup is the envy of many of its neighbouring communities.

Finally, the following quotes by locals summarise well the Balingup story and spirit:

- *'Balingup is a diverse, vibrant community that nurtures and supports all who choose to live here'* (Helen Christensen, local shire councillor).
- *'Balingup is a town with vision and commitment. It has acknowledged the importance of planning as a community, embraced the process and generated projects with creativity and flair. With a core group of committed residents the community are working together to develop a sustainable future for their town'* (Jane Manning, Regional Development Officer, South West Development Commission).
- *'With the change in population, a new and diverse range of activities have been created which has captured the support of the local community. Although there has been a transition from an agricultural based community to a more creative, lifestyle seeking and tourism oriented population, I believe the spirit of support and community involvement is as strong today as it has ever been'* (Edgar Hawter, Balingup farmer).

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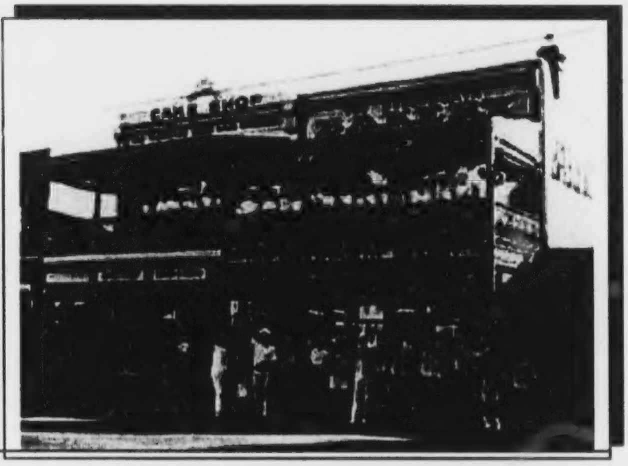
B. Beechworth, Victoria



Beechworth was once the administrative centre for a vast gold field, resulting in the creation of a magnificent Victorian stone townsite. It achieved a population of over 20,000 inhabitants. With the decline of the goldfields, the economic life of Beechworth contracted.

Through the twentieth century it became increasingly dependent on public sector institutional employment, despite winning a series of beautiful town awards in the 1920s. By 1984, with a population of 3,154, the welfare institutions provided the basis for its demographic and employment life – 30 jobs and 100 prisoners in the prison, 30 jobs and 17 patients in the district hospital, 30 jobs and 134 patients in the Hospital for the Aged, and 525 jobs and 501 patients at the mental health facility, Mayday Hills Hospital (Woods, 1985:193)

The state of the community was captured in 1984 by the words of the town's official historian, Carole Woods (1985:193) – *'Beechworth, once a vigorous, multi-faceted regional centre, has become heavily dependent on welfare institutions which tend to have a stultifying effect on community life and sap the initiative required for the diversification of local economic enterprise. Over one third of the population of Beechworth are either inmates, patients or employees of the welfare institutions'*.

However, 1984 was in many ways the year for the start of the transformation of Beechworth, from a contracting community based on institutional employment to one that has built on its unique heritage streetscape and embraced tourism. 1984 was the year that a former resident, Tom O'Toole returned to Beechworth and purchased a struggling bakery, and commenced a journey that has not only revitalised the town of Beechworth, but instigated a national business icon, that has inspired countless rural communities and businesses across Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. *'Sixteen years ago, when I bought the Beechworth Bakery, people didn't say "I'm going for a drive to Beechworth" unless they were going to visit Mad Aunty in the lunatic asylum, or one of their relations in the jail. Sixteen years ago, it was a government town... Look at Beechworth today. It's a hive of activity on the weekend. But when I came to town 16 years ago, these shops were all boarded up.'* (O'Toole, 2000:3, 196).

The phenomenal success of the Beechworth Bakery has been synonymous with the success of Beechworth. Many locals and commentators would credit the Bakery with turning around Beechworth's ailing economy. It provides a wonderful illustration of the impact and contribution that one business can have on a town. It illustrates the importance of the quality of local business life as the powerhouse driving the economic and employment fortunes of a community.

In 1984, Tom O'Toole purchased the Beechworth Bakery. Its purchase state reflected the sad empty shop state of the commercial district – it employed two part time staff, and had an annual turnover of $100,000. Today, its achievements for a business located three hours from a capital city and not on a major highway, are remarkable:

- largest turnover of any retail bakery in Australia
- annual turnover of $3 million
- 670,000 customers during the past year
- employment of 65 staff

- $27,000 taken over the counter in one day
- the Victorian Tourism Award winner for significant Regional Attraction on three occasions, plus a host of national and state business and customer service awards.

In the words of author, Lowell Tarling – '*the Beechworth Bakery is more successful than corporate breadshops, the franchises and the city bakeries, and Tom has done it in the little town of Beechworth. Beechworth has a population of 3,149, yet the Beechworth Bakery's turnover is the equivalent of taking $1 from every person in the Sydney metropolitan area, every year. Can you believe it?*' (O'Toole, 2000:248).

Its impact on Beechworth, and its business and employment basis is equally impressive. His success has activated a chain reaction in the town. Today the town is a major tourism centre, and despite the dramatic closure and job rationalisation within its public sector institutions (eg, the Mayday Hills Hospital has closed with the loss of 500 jobs), Beechworth is growing in population and employment opportunity and diversity.

Without doubt, central to the story is the Beechworth Bakery and its creative approach to business and staff development. It's owner, Tom O'Toole readily shares his recipe for 'Making Dough his Way' (Ashton, 1999), and provides a set of ingredients that many other towns and its business and civic leaders could learn from. That famous recipe for success has eight key elements:

- Love cashflow and do that little bit extra
- Provide exceptional customer service
- Implement innovative merchandising techniques
- Activate a creative marketing strategy
- Excite and motivate staff members
- Network and cross promote with other local businesses
- Participate in a never ending search for new ideas
- Be passionate

Concrete illustrations of these ingredients being put into practice are numerous and include:

- Beechworth Dollars, as an incentive to visit Beechworth,
- pipes from the Bakehouse connected to the street and fans pumping hot bread smells up and down the street,
- a jazz band on the balcony every Sunday,
- international and national staff visit and exchange program,
- place mats advertising other businesses,
- bread wrappers reminding customers what to see in Beechworth,
- feedback forms inviting customer suggestions (200 a month are returned),
- 260 product lines,
- inspirational posters throughout the buildings,
- clean and poster free front windows,
- regular staff customer service training,
- staff recognition initiatives,
- staff handbook,
- staff meetings to determine policy and practice,
- use of Bakery for fun community public meetings,
- customer convenience in terms of opening times, 6.00am to 7.00pm, seven days a week,
- television marketing.

Tom O'Toole's role modelling of best practice and its subsequent financial rewards has permeated the Beechworth business community. Business appearance, merchandising methodologies, regular events, cross promotion and product range are now a hallmark of many local businesses. Beechworth is an excellent illustration of the importance of local business vitality and best practice.

There are other important factors in Beechworth's remarkable revitalisation including:

- **Facilitation role of local government**. With the amalgamation of local government in 1994, the Shire of Indigo was created through the grouping of a set of historic towns. Local lobbying against becoming part of the City of Wodonga enabled the creation of a unique council that had a strong focus on heritage and tourism. The council employs a six person team within a Tourism and Economic Development Unit, incuding a specialist Special Events Coordinator and dedicated Visitor Information Centre staff. Council's facilitative and leadership role has seen the development of an impressive calender of events (eg, Golden Horseshow Festival, Celtic Festival, Drive Back in Time Festival, Harvest Festival), creation of an accredited tourist information centre and projects like the current $2 million Heritage and Culture Precedent project, Lake Sambell project and the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail. Over the last five years, council has accessed $3.5 million in outside funding for initiatives.

- **Victorian Building ambience**. The relative lack of twentieth century building intrusion and the presence of 32 National Trust listed buildings has certainly given Beechworth a unique and very attractive Victorian townscape. It is rapidly becoming nationally known as one of the country's best historic towns and interpreted as a microcosm of Australia's history. Council's forethought in terms of building regulations ensures the towns heritage preservation and enhancement. Its popularity as a location for new settlers and businesses is due to is ambience.

- **Capitalisation of unique community assets**. Beechworth has many illustrations of such thinking and actions. For example, the building upon the Ned Kelly connection, the Sambell Lake beautification project and the re-use of the old Mayday Hospital as a tertiary eduction and conference facility.

- **Economic diversity**. Beechworth and its business and agricultural districts has numerous examples of diversification and value adding, and innovative new business creation. In particular, the community was an early innovator in terms of embracing tourism and it has developed a national reputation in terms of heritage tourism, special events, arts and crafts, farm tourism and the bed and breakfast industry.

- **Attitude**. During the period when government service rationalisation was occurring, the importance of a positive attitude was essential. In the words of Tom O'Toole – '*the only thing that pulled the town out of these "doom and gloom times" was a change of attitude. We had to get rid of this government hand-fed mentality*'. (Powell, 2000).

- **Active Chamber of Commerce**. Throughout the years, the Chamber has been a focus for committed business people to unite and advocate for positive developments. It has been a key ally with council in the creation of the Tourism Information Centre and the calender of special events. Council certainly has seen the Chamber as a valuable sounding board for opinion on developments.

- **Regional tourist initiatives**. Beechworth has particularly benefited from regional tourist initiatives like the 'Legends, Wine and High Country' promotion of north east Victoria by Tourism Victoria. The depth of stories and achievements of Beechworth has made it a prime focus for support by groups like Tourism Victoria.

- **Lifestyle attraction**. Beechworth is being promoted and viewed as a lifestyle alternative destination especially for professional people able to locate work in regional centres like Wodonga and Wangaratta only 30 minutes away. In the words of its Manager of Tourism and Economic Development, Terry Robinson, '*Beechworth is becoming a northeast Victoria "Sea Change" alternative*'.

The following statements by residents and outside commentators further explain the revitalisation story of Beechworth and why it continues to thrive as a vibrant small regional centre.

- *'Back in the 1920s, Beechworth was a "Beautiful Towns' award winner. Then the town goes to sleep for 50 years supported through government institution life. It was awakened through necessity and grasping the opportunity of being one of Australia's premier heritage towns. The combination of the town's ambience, businesses like the Bakery, focus on tourism and heritage by Council, all contributed to making what Beechworth is today'.* (Andrew Banks, local shire councillor and business person).

- *'We have been here ten years and we have seen a dramatic swing from employment that was institution based to businesses based on tourism. And the Bakery has had a major part in that'* (Elizabeth Mason, Beechworth business person).

- *'The lesson of the Beechworth Bakery – quality products, exceptional customer service, innovative marketing and merchandising, staff motivation and involvement, business networking and loads of passion, is a message that needs communicating. The Beechworth Bakery truly captures all these elements, and its story is having a phenomenal impact across the country'* (Peter Kenyon, Director of the Centre for Small Town Development, quoted in Ashton, 1999).

- *'The Bakery has done a lot for this town. The town has become a tourist destination'* (Alec Armitage, owner, The Beechworth Sweet Company).

- *'The Bakery is an absolutely magnificent drawcard for Beechworth, and any business that draws people to Beechworth means other businesses get the spin off benefits'* (Ian Allen, Beechworth newsagent).

- *'Tom and Beechworth gives the mere mortal man and small town hope for the future. He has shown that it is not rocket science stuff, but to do with a pile of basics'* (Peter Palmer, local economic development consultant).

And finally some insights from Tom O'Toole:

- *'The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little bit extra. Who wants to be a bit ordinary? Who wants to be average? Just that little bit extra, that's all we've got to do'.*

- *'The key to success is all about people: 5% technology, 95% psychology'.*

- *'Customer complaints are the school books from which we learn'.*

- *'Don't tell me what I'm doing wrong, tell me what I'm doing right'.*

- *'Only when we continue to raise our goals do we allow ourselves to grow'.*

- *'In every town or business there has to be the WOW factor, WOW is the answer'.*

- *'The believers pick up the prizes in life'.*

- *'Every morning, within 15 minutes of waking up, I read something positive, something inspirational'.*

- *'What if I train my people and they leave? What if you don't train them and they stay!'*

- *'If you are not determined, utterly determined to stand out you are history. We get so comfortable. We get store blind, shop blind, town blind... it's about change, its about going beyond your own backyard, getting outside that comfort zone.'*

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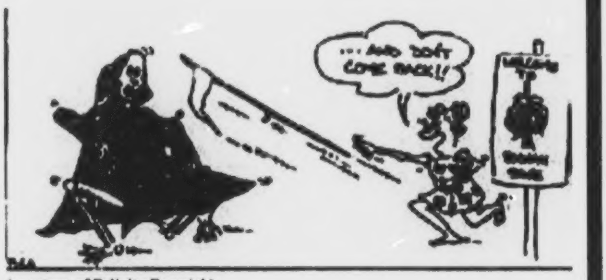
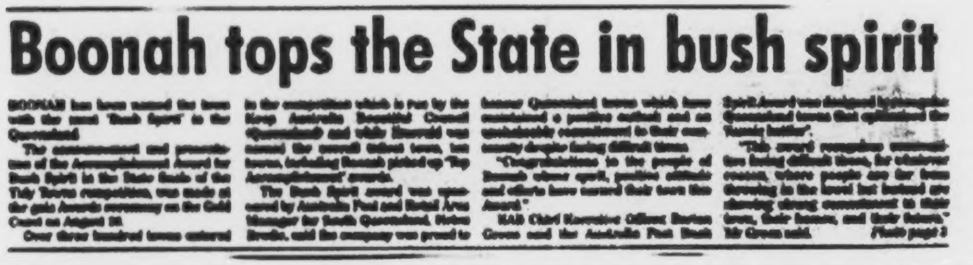
C. Boonah,
Queensland

Boonah today is the vibrant heart of a small rural shire in south east Queensland. The township of Boonah has a resident population of 2,700, while the Boonah Shire is home to 8,000 people. Despite its proximity to key centres – Ipswich (30 minutes), Brisbane (90 minutes) and Gold Coast (45 minutes) – Boonah is often referred to as 'pure rural heartland'.


...AND DON'T COME BACK!!

(courtesy of Felicity Fenwick)



Boonah tops the State in bush spirit

Like many inland Queensland rural towns, it enjoyed the boom times during most of the twentieth century, but experienced the full negative impact of the more recent rural agricultural downturn. However, through vision and the formulation and implementation of a comprehensive action plan, Boonah has achieved national recognition for its community led rural economic revival.

Their amazing story is captured well in the words of two locals (Stanfield and Creighton, 2000:1):

'Once upon a time, there was a thriving rural community which enjoyed full employment. Rural industries thrived. The local sawmills employed over 500 people and the butter factory and the dairying industry employed hundreds. Small crop production, the grazing industry and all the associated support industries that form the framework of a vibrant rural community, created bustling towns and villages and ensured that there were jobs for all.

However, with the downturn in rural commodities and the exodus of rural people to the cities looking for easier, better paying employment, the economies of these communities started to fade. The mills closed. The butter factory closed and moved to the city. Shops were empty, boarded up or pulled down. Employment for young people was almost non-existent unless they went into the family business or onto the subsistence like existence of the family farm.

The forecasts for the future were clouds of doom and gloom and visions of ghost towns, retirement villages and empty streets were taking shape in people's minds. We faced a future that appeared to hold only two options:

- *a dying and destitute rural community clinging to its traditions as its youth drifted to the cities, those who remained grew older and lost hope; or*
- *it would become a dormitory suburb for the nearby metropolitan centres, the soul of the community would be lost and the rural nature and strength of our Shire would wither.*

But then, through the clouds of doom and gloom, thin shafts of light began to appear. Shafts of light in the form of new ideas. Ideas of change. Ideas of dumping the traditions which were tired and ineffectual and bolstering those which strengthened us as a community.

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Ideas of not feeling sorry for ourselves. Ideas of doing things for ourselves to carve out a more viable future. Ideas to seek help, to start the process. Ideas for the community to keep control of the process. Ideas from a core group of enthusiastic, positive and committed people who started down the path which leads to the happy-ever-after'.

A series of events, actions and achievements since the late 1980s have provided the structure for the Boonah story. In the words of the editor of local newspaper, the *Fassifern Guardian*, Wendy Creighton *'we looked for small ways in which we could make a difference. Our overnight success is the result of about 15 years of hard work'* (Johnston, 2000:16). The following are important story components:

- Rejuvenation of the main street of Boonah. A desire to convert an architecturally unappealing, grey and boring street into a green, leafy, colourful and inviting community heart was the initial catalyst for community economic development. After failing three times to achieve funding from the State Mainstreet Program, locals decided to utilise the principles of Mainstreet, but carry out the revitalisation task with their own resources. This five year project started in 1992. The result represented a huge change for a conservative rural community, particularly when the two way street changed into a one way thoroughfare with new angle parking and garden beds. The expected hostility from some quarters was quickly overcome as a safer, cooler and more aesthetically pleasing CBD eventuated. Today the beautiful streetscape is a source of much local pride, and of visitor praise. Above all, it represented an illustration of the change possible through local effort.
- Creation of a working partnership between the Boonah Shire Council and the Boonah Shire Chamber of Commerce. This helped to mobilise civic and business support for development.
- Attendance at a Positive Rural Futures Conference. In 1998, a Boonah team attended this conference at Biloela. Through exposure to what other communities were undertaking, and a range of encouraging and inspiring conference sessions, the team returned to Boonah convinced they were on the right path, and determined to marshal ideas and resources and implemented a comprehensive action plan. As one local put it *'we came home from that Conference believing that we could change our world and in essence we did and we have'*.
- Coordination of a Community Opportunities Workshop. Utilizing Peter Kenyon from the Centre for Small Town Development, a Community Opportunities Workshop was held in May 1999. This event attracted 250 participants, and resulted in the prioritisation of 20 project areas. Subsequently, 10 of the project areas have been implemented.
- Employment of an Economic Development Officer. Through funding from the Federal Government's Regional Assistance Programme, a project officer was appointed to develop a number of project areas that emerged from the workshop.
- Tourism Project. Being adjacent to seven national parks and World Heritage Listed areas was something locals had taken for granted. The realisation of the potential of this comparative advantage resulted in a plan to enhance the eco tourism opportunities of the shire. A $207,000 grant enabled the Ecotourism project to begin in October 1999, and to date an ecotourism strategy is in place, a database is being built, promotional material developed and value adding opportunities for local farmers and landowners identified.
- Introduction of the Boonah Shire Rural Economic Development Institute. Through a partnership with the Bank of IDEAS, the concept of an annual conference based on best practice in rural economic development was designed and implemented in October 1999. Such an event attracted participants and resource people from across Australia, New Zealand and the USA. It was based on the Nebraska Rural Development Institute in the USA, an opportunity for experimental learning within a living laboratory. The Institute has attracted a grant of $80,000 from the Federal Government, enabling it to expand into a calender of events. The Institute has returned many benefits to the Boonah community – national and state media focus, economic contribution from the presence of two hundred participants, partnership with a host of state and federal departments and organisations, the reality of over 100 volunteers working together, and

the unique opportunity to showcase the richness and diversity of the Boonah Shire.

The vision that Boonah locals have for their Institute is that it will become a dynamic force in championing the following fundamental philosophies:

- *'vibrant rural communities which draw on, sustain and enhance the natural and human resources;*
- *rural areas which have retained or rebuilt their sense and depth of community, where the integration of new and old creates a foundation for a viable and acceptable future for all sectors of the rural population;*
- *the principal income for farming or grazing families is gleaned from the land through farming operations which have diversified into or have created burgeoning niche markets, or be catering to the urban desire to sample the bush experience;*
- *the valuable heritage and bank of knowledge represented by these families remains a resource for rural Australia and a repository for the basis of our national identity and prosperity;*
- *defined and exciting career paths are available to young people within their rural communities and the rural youth 'drop out' and suicide statistics have zeroed out;*
- *the belief that rural communities were once built from within and can and must be built from within again,'* (Stanfield and Creighton, 2000:5).

Boonah has an impressive record of other initiatives that have demonstrated the community's ability to dream, plan and achieve, including:

- the Tom Quilty 2000 Gold Cup - the local Fassifern Horse and Pony Club won the opportunity to host the most prestigious endurance ride in the country resulting in massive economic and profile benefits to Boonah.
- Industry innovation. Boonah over the last several years has been the seedbed for a variety of initiatives demonstrating excellence in value adding and diversification including:

  Bunny Bite Farms. This unique $2m vegetable processing and packaging plant implemented by two local farmers. Utilising state of the art technology to increase shelf life and appeal of vegetables, it now employs 35 people.

  Ironbark Recyclers. This company employing over 30 people has brought the town's sawmill back to life by value adding recycled hardwoods. They are now successfully marketing the product into Asia, and through their work on the Boonah Streetscape linked to a contact resulting in a massive contract with Olympic Games venues.

  Abbotsfield Country Cottages. An innovative business utilising the Old Butter Factory to build cottages and then move them onto site, thus minimising delays due to weather and environmental damage.

  - Tradespersons' Cooperative. As a response to the discovery that local builders only secured contracts for 9 of the last 35 new houses in the Shire (representing a loss of $2.5 million), eight local tradespeople have formed a cooperative company to work together.
  - New Crops Initiative. Learning from a New Zealand project ' Crops for Southland', and with support from the Department of Primary Industry, a community initiative is now in place supporting crop diversification.
  - Regional Sustainable Development Project. With the support of the Sustainable Industry Division of the Environmental Protection Authority, Boonah through its Institute will assess and implement opportunities for economic development from the sustainable development perspective.
- Agricultural tourism. Recent initiatives include two new wineries and the establishment of a Farm Stay industry sector.
- Shopping complex construction. Two new shopping complexes have been built in the main street during the last year.

During 2000, Boonah has won two major awards for its efforts in community and economic development. Firstly, it won the State Award for the town with the most 'bush spirit' in Queensland. As part of the state finals of the Tidy Towns competition, the 'Bush Spirit' award was given for its 'Aussie battler' nature. Secondly, Boonah achieved the National Award for Innovation in Local Government – Community Services Category, for its Rural Economic Development Institute. This award was given by the National Office of Local Government.

Locals and commentators reflecting on the Boonah experience have identified a number of factors that have contributed to the positive revitalisation experience, namely:

- **Commitment.** Change has occurred in Boonah due to the determination and extraordinary level of commitment by a number of local people and groups. Johnson (2000:18) summarised their spirit well, *'be prepared to get your hands dirty. There is no part of community economic development that "just happens"'*.
- **Local entrepreneurialism.** The entrepreneurial flair of local people is a key factor in the town's positive development. It is well captured by the Mayor, and local entrepreneur, John Brent – *'In our area we are lucky to have entrepreneurial individuals ... that's part of the strength of the community. The tenacity and individualism is coming to the fore, and they are using their own resources to establish things ... it's not with government handouts. More than half the phone calls I receive are from people looking for help, advice and direction on moving forward, doing something or creating something within our shire'* (Wright, 2000:4).
- **Initial streetscape activities**. This was a catalyst for future change. It showed the community the positive social and economic impact that could be achieved if people worked together. It initiated the regular community consultation that occurs in Boonah, and it taught much about maintaining momentum despite regular criticism.
- **Positive community attitude and ownership**. The community has worked hard on building the community's belief in itself. It uses every opportunity to highlight the positive aspects of the community including a weekly newspaper column entitled Ramblings, seizing any opportunity to speak about the community at state and national events. A local speaking team has addressed six such events in the last 12 months. A popular expression in Boonah is *'Never go away. Never falter. Never say die'*.
- **Local leadership**. Boonah is blessed with a core of passionate energetic leaders in civic, business and community sectors. The partnership between Council and the Chamber of Commerce is a major factor in the towns achievement. In the words of Ian Flint (council CEO and Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce) – *'Boonah Shire Council and the Boonah Shire Chamber of Commerce have formed a unique partnership of working together to create opportunities and drive initiatives for development of the Boonah Shire community. Our collective resources have been focused on the common objective of helping our community to help itself to revive and strengthen its social and economic base from within'*.
- **Smart use of outside resources**. Over the last 2 years Boonah has been the recipient of over $350,000 funding from state and federal governments. Early in the process they recruited a journalist to prepare applications, and in the words of local builder Rick Stanfield *'we have adopted an attitude of never going away; if we are knocked back the first time we find out why and then overcome each problem as it is presented'*. Creighton adds further insight to the necessary process – *'we soon learned that the day you submit a grant application is the day that the hard work begins... you have to know your project inside out and be prepared to argue your case strongly'* (Johnson, 2000:18).
- **Importance of outside community champions**. Boonah has invested in building positive relationships with a host of people at state, national and international levels, always ready to promote and support the efforts of Boonah. In particular, their local federal member, Kay Elison, has been tireless in her support, as have a host of energetic and visionary public servants working in a variety of departments.

- **Focus on young men and women**. Boonah has a strong focus on the active involvement of young people. There are numerous illustrations of this attitude:
    - Young people are strongly represented in the Institute team of volunteers.
    - The Institute has a special youth development program.
    - $20,000 was secured to erect a skate bowl.
    - Boonah was the first community in Australia to pilot the national 'Youth at the Centre' initiative.
    - A strong objective of the Tradespersons' Cooperative is to collectively employ young people, six new apprenticeships resulted in the first six months of operation.
- **The fun component**. Boonah people knew the time commitment that would be required to ensure the success of their numerous projects. They understood that the only way they could operate was to ensure the process was fun. *'We make it all social. People trying to get an event together don't have formal meetings, they sit and talk in a nice café. If I had an idea to float, I'd invite the relevant people to dinner. Between 10.00pm and midnight the best ideas start to flow'* (Creighton in Johnson, 2000:18).
- **Belief in the interdependency between town and rural hinterland**. Boonah is a community whose beliefs are firmly based in its rural heritage. They believe that for a rural community to retain its identity and lifestyle, there must be a vibrancy in both the town based and the rural based economies. Both economies are viewed as inseparably interlinked, and all must work together to create a common positive future.

Much more could be recorded about Boonah and its unique spirit. The following words by locals provide a fitting summary:

- *'Capitalise on our dormant social capital and there is little we can't achieve as a community'* (Wendy Creighton, Editor, The Fassifern Guardian);
- *'In the early 1990s, we realised that our community was at a crossroads. One road, the easier path, let to our future engulfment as a dormitory suburb for the cities; the more difficult road to our continuation as a rural centre using innovative and commonsense projects to ensure a viable town and rural based economy. We chose the difficult, but ultimately more rewarding road.'* (Stanfield and Creighton, 2000:1);
- *'We often hear the words - "we need to slow down", "we are going too fast", "it's been tried before", "it will never work", "it's all too new, too difficult". We hear them, but we don't heed them'*. (Stanfield and Creighton, 2000:2);
- *'The many skilled people in our community have been able to come together as one and achieve what seemed impossible to them when they were acting in isolation. The Council/Chamber partnership has provided the vehicle for unity of purpose and harmony of relationships in the community and has allowed Councillors and citizens to positively interact and share ideas and work side by side to drive our community forward into the new Millennium ... The Boonah Shire revitalisation has been a team effort and that is why it has been so successful. The community of Boonah Shire has much to be proud of, but the vital reason for the success of its self-development is the spirit of co-operation and teamwork'*. (Ian Flint, CEO, Boonah Shire Council).

Perhaps, finally Stanfield and Creighton (2000:2) capture the spirit, motivation and interest of Boonah. *'It is up to us, the community, to ensure that our wealth of human and natural resource is used to sustain and enhance our lifestyle, to create interesting career paths for our youth and to ensure that our development is both socially and economically sustainable'*.

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D. Burra, South Australia

Burra (population 980) located 160 kms north of Adelaide represents an exciting story of revitalisation made possible through the combination of heritage presentation, creative tourism marketing and the unique contribution and creativity of a local action and preservation group, namely the Burra Burra Branch of the National Trust of South Australia.

Two correspondents have both well summarised the Burra story. Firstly Carolyn Collins of The Australian. *'Today the South Australian mid north town is enjoying a tourism inspired boom at a time when other rural areas are in decline, thanks to some nifty marketing and the determination of a group of local people committed to saving their heritage'* (Collins, 2000:14). Secondly, Mary Clark of the Community Link Magazine: *'short on people power, but long on ingenuity, National Trust volunteers have staged a takeover of a small town, increased its visitor numbers and brought it new vitality'* (Clark, 1998:4).

Burra was the first surveyed mining town in Australia, and its earliest buildings and mine operations date back to 1845 when copper was discovered and mining began. Reflecting the influence of a variety of immigrant workers, especially Cornish miners, an extensive townsite evolved. By 1851 Burra was the richest copper mine in the world and Australia's largest inland town. Its famed 'monster mine' was the largest metal mine in Australia up to 1860. However, mining ceased in 1877 and the town continued primarily as a pastoral centre.

By the 1960s, the town reflected the state of a key building, Redruth Gaol, which had fallen into disrepair and become a home for sheep. In 1965, out of concern about the state of the Gaol, a public meeting was held. It was decided to mount preservation action under the banner of the State's most respected heritage organisation, the National Trust. A local branch was formed, and attracted local volunteers and benefactors determined to preserve the unique building and mining heritage of the community, and initiate new economic life into the town.

The achievement of this local organisation over the last 35 years has been remarkable, and it represents an excellent model of local action and creativity. Key milestones in its actions have included:

- 1965 - The Redruth Gaol and Old Dugouts were secured as Trust properties.
- 1966 - The former residence and shop of Andrew Wade was gifted to the Burra National Trust by its first chairman. It became the Market Square Museum, serving also as the Trust's headquarters. Operated by volunteers, this Museum gave the Trust its first income, and became the first of many properties given or leased to the Trust by government bodies, individuals or the local council.
- 1970 - The reopening of the Burra Mine Site galvanised local support for its heritage buildings when several key mine buildings were threatened with demolition. Peacocks Chimney was subsequently dismantled, stone by stone, and re-erected on land owned by local members of the Trust.
- Early 1970s - The National Trust Branch introduced the idea of a key hire system to access Redruth Gaol and the miners' dugouts. The National Trust branch, local Apex club and District Council of Burra Burra joined in creating a guide book to complement the key hire system.
- 1979 - Burra was used as a setting for the acclaimed Australian film production 'Breaker Morant' which contributed significantly to the local economy, and illustrated the creative use of its heritage and physical setting.
- 1979 - Burra gained national attention by being the home of the 'Burra Charter', now

acknowledged as a statement of the fundamental principles and procedures to be followed in heritage conservation.

- 1979 - Burra Tourist Office opened and was initially funded by the sale of publications by local historian Mr Ian Auhl. These books on Burra are still available for sale at the Burra Visitor Centre.
- 1980 - Burra Township was placed on the Register of the National Estate.
- 1988 - Burra introduced an innovative scheme called the Burra Heritage Passport based on the key hire system. This passport comes with a key which today enables visitors to gain access to eight locked heritage sites and interpretation for 47 sites throughout an 11 kilometre heritage trail. The passport scheme provided the Trust with the necessary income to maintain and conserve sites.
- 1988 - A Heritage Advisory Service was introduced into South Australia. Burra was the first town to appoint a heritage architect (Mr Douglas Alexander) to provide free advice to the Council and residents. Mr Alexander continues in the role and is funded by Council and Heritage SA.
- 1993 - Burra was declared a State Heritage Area.
- 1997 - The amalgamation of local government provided a new opportunity for the Trust to take an even greater role in tourism and heritage preservation. The new regional Council of Goyder agreed to lease the operation of the Burra Visitor Centre and a number of council owned buildings on the heritage trail.
- 1998 - The town attracted the attention of the Flinders University School of Archaeology and Cultural Tourism. With the help of the Mid North Regional Development Board, an exciting partnership was formed between the Trust, the Board, the Regional Council and Flinders University. A three year initiative called the Burra Community Archaeology Project is being funded by the Australian Research Council, the Flinders University Industry Collaborative Research Grant Scheme and the Mid North Regional Development Board. The project is researching the archaeological manifestations of multiculturalism in colonial Australia. The aim of Burra is eventually to create a Flinders University Annexe in Burra.

No doubt, if the National Trust Branch had not taken the proactive stance that it has since 1965, much of what makes Burra an attractive tourist destination would have disappeared. Over time, locals have become used to the idea that preserving their unique heritage is good for business and local employment, especially during the recent decade of depressed wool prices. Currently, local tourist accommodation can provide 400 beds for overnight accommodation, and Burra attracts 30,000 visitors per year. It is estimated that these tourists contribute $10 million into the local economy (Collins, 2000:4).

Burra has also seen the diversification into a wide range of other economic initiatives that have attracted state and national attention, including Adchem (Aust) exporting copper products, Thorogoods of Burra apple cider, carob production and the Saltbush Clothing Company. The Mid North Development Board and the Goyder Regional Council have been proactive in attracting outside businesses, and their efforts recently have led to a new $4 million poultry business which will eventually employ 20 people and a perlite processing plant that will eventually employ 80 persons. The district surrounding Burra also claims the title of Merino Capital of the World, reflecting its importance still as a pastoral region.

Factors identified by locals as important in the town's revitalisation include:

- **Recognition of their comparative advantage in terms of heritage assets.** The Chair of the local National Trust Branch has summarised this aspect well: *'The Australia Heritage Commission ranks this town as amongst the six most important historic towns in Australia and obviously the locals have woken up to this in due course'* (Collins, 2000:4).
- **Innovative marketing.** While many communities share the same extensive wealth of heritage assets, Burra has been exceptionally successful in the way it has appreciated and marketed the opportunity to enjoy its heritage. Besides allowing the coordination of, and access to a wide range of tourist heritage sites at all times, the Burra Heritage Passport returns a handsome profit of $130,000 per year. This enables

the employment of a Visitor Centre Manager and an Information Officer.

- **The role of the Burra Burra Branch of the National Trust of South Australia**. This organisation over a thirty five year period has illustrated its management effectiveness as a local driver of both heritage preservation and tourism marketing. It has evolved from a volunteer community organisation to a major business organisation now employing a full time visitor centre manager and 19 part-time and casual staff. Its annual budget exceeds $200,000.

  Its mission statement is *'to preserve and develop historic sites and heritage elements in and around Burra to make this town a premier centre for Australian cultural tourism, education and research'*.

  It is acknowledged nationally as a model for best practice in heritage management and associated tourism development. Its statement of objectives is an excellent summary of its vision and professional approach during its thirty-five year history:

  - *'to take an active role in developing and consolidating the business of tourism in and around Burra.*
  - *to identify the key heritage elements upon which the Branch is to concentrate its resources, and plan their development.*
  - *to manage the assets and business of the Branch in accordance with principles of good governance and community obligation and responsibilities,*
  - *to work with National Trust, government agencies, universities and other authorities to recognise the copper town of Burra as being in the top rank of heritage places in Australia'.*
- **Strategic alliances**. Burra has benefited greatly by the desire of key local and regional organisations to force close collaborative arrangements. The alliance between the National Trust, Goyder Regional Council and the Mid North Regional Development Board has been instrumental in many of the recent initiatives related to cultural development and industry attraction. Councils generally have always struggled with their responsibility with its built heritage responsibility. In Burra, the local Council's alliance and agreement with National Trust has enabled heritage preservation and tourism to happen on a scale not seen in other small towns in Australia. It has proved a smart way of managing the town's heritage.

Finally, the words of some of the partners in Burra's revitalisation story:

- *'So the story is ... in a small heritage rich country town with less than 1,000, a few movers can take it far ... our story has been about people - having the right people with vision at the right time'* (Maureen Wright, Chair, the Burra Branch of National Trust).
- *'Burra is a great place to live and work because of the vision of a few people in the 70s and 80s. Their vision is passed on like a relay and with the support of Council, the Trust and others, Burra will not just survive but will grow socially and economically to be an example to other small towns. By setting goals, time and effort are not wasted on minor issues as we work together towards the bigger picture of where we want to be as a community'* (Stephen Kerrigan, CEO, Regional Council of Goyder).
- *'Vibrant communities create a successful recipe for the foundations of strong economic development. Burra has proved that culture development strategies can produce direct economic benefits to its community'* (Craig Wilson, CEO, Mid North Regional Development Board).
- *'This collaboration has been very fruitful for all of the partners. Working together, we are able to move forward so that all of us benefit. This project serves as a model for universities working with industry and community bodies'* (Dr Claire Smith, Project Director, Archaeology Department, Flinders University).

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E. Coolah,

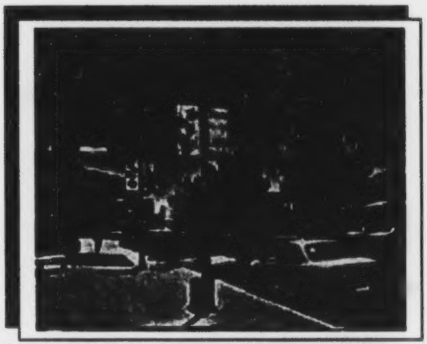
New South Wales

On 5 November, 1999, a Giant Street Party was held in Coolah to celebrate the community's achievements over the previous four years. The event represented the opening of the first stage of their magnificent revamped main street, the official 'turn on' of their new heritage lighting and the first birthday of their community Telecentre.

In the words of the local newspaper editor, Gary Connolly, such a celebration event *'finally killed the self fulfilling prophecy that this town was dying - that dragon has well and truly been killed'*.

Coolah is a small central west New South Wales agricultural service town, 360 kms north west of Sydney. With a population of 880 and servicing a district population of 1,500 people, this small town experienced significant economic and social down-turn due to the rural recession, drought and particularly the closure of the town's mill following the State Government conversion of the local State Forest into a National Park. These actions, together with the discovery that Coolah was left off a range of recently published tourism and national parks maps spurred local residents to take action.

In the words of local farmer, Michael White - *'we harnessed the negative energy against the loss of the sawmill and redirected it to positive change through the vehicle of the Coolah District Development Group. We used public forums and took a community planning approach in partnership with local government: in other words organising and communicating like a business and taking a business approach to planning our future'* (White, 2000:1).



A local development and coordination vehicle, the Coolah District Development Group, was created with the following mission statement: *'to foster safe, healthy, cultural and heritage environment for our community; preserve our town services, character and continue to encourage growth and development of the district with productive and sustainable industries'*. Through support from the Department of State and Regional Development, a community planning process was instigated resulting in a variety of key themes - mainstreet redevelopment, tourism, garden festivals, youth, marketing, health, agriculture, Coolah Tops National Park, signage, mobile phone coverage, technology ...

During the second half of 1996, an eight step strategy gave the community development focus, profile and success:

- Step 1 - ' Put Coolah back on the map' with a street photograph involving 600 Coolah residents. It succeeded in gaining widespread media attention.
- Step 2 - 'Clean up Coolah's act' - a major spring clean event.
- Step 3 - 'You don't get a second chance at a first impression' - employed landscape architects to prepare plans to beautify the main street.

- Step 4 - 'Raise money for the streetscaping' - an open garden weekend was organised involving eight local gardens and raised $22,000.
- Step 5 - 'Create attractive town entrances' - entrance statements and signs were prepared and installed.
- Step 6 - 'Lobby government' - funding was sought for an all weather road to access the national park and enhance tourism numbers.
- Steps 7 and 8 - 'Promote the district' - a colourful brochure and a tourism video were both produced.

From that early strategy, Coolah has continued to put in place an impressive set of projects that have built community pride, confidence and positive economic outcomes, including:

- focus on, and continual upgrade of, their mainstreet, providing the community with an attractive heart and a constant source of pride for locals and positive comment by visitors. In the words of the initial coordinator of their Development Group, Eleanor Cook - *'it's very important we make the main street the town's meeting place once again. We want people to be attracted to going down the street where they can meet with other people. As you never get a second chance at a first impression, we know a beautiful main street will attract visitors and people feel good about the place'*. So far over $500,000 has been expended in a main street heritage refurbishment;
- establishment of a local Telecentre which was born out of a need to provide low cost internet access and technology based opportunities for Coolah residents. Funding to build the Telecentre and establish their own Internet Service Provider (ISP) business was jointly funded by grants from the Networking the Nation program and The Department of Primary Industries and Energy. The Centre employs five people.
- creation of mobile telephone coverage for the Shire.
- setting up of a youth council.
- facilitation of a series of initiatives to identify and minimise economic leakage, resulting in 3 new businesses providing a total of 16 jobs, together with an emphasis on shopping locally.

Locals have identified a number of factors that have contributed to their successful process and outcomes, namely -

- **The wake up call**. The creation of a national park and the subsequent closure of their timber mill was a crisis turning point and gave the town *'a smell of death'* according to Gary Connolly, the first chairperson of the Coolah District Development Group. However, locals were determined to take responsibility for their own destiny.
- **Creation of a development vehicle**. The creation of The Coolah District Development Group in august 1994 was an early step in the revitalisation efforts. It is an independent non-profit organisation with a widely based membership drawn from businesses, individuals and community groups. They are united in their commitment to the positive growth of the Coolah community. The organisation also generates $5,000 per year through an imaginative membership scheme.
- **Use of community development planning processes**. Throughout the last five years, Coolah has regularly had planning forums and utilised outside facilitators. These events have generated both ideas, and community commitment to ensure their implementation. The support of the Department of State and Regional Development has been invaluable in this process.
- **Community inclusiveness**. A strong operational principle evident in Coolah is community inclusiveness. The Development Group operates through a series of focused sub-groups, and has sought to maximise community input and participation through public workshops, working bees, and community fund raising initiatives. Development Group members also discovered early the need to approach people personally to get involved. As active member Susie Brown expressed it - *'I would never have participated if someone had not approached me personally and asked me to get involved'*.

Coolah highlights the significant role played by social capital in community development - that process of community participation, networking and cooperating for mutual benefit. As local farmer Michael White, reflecting on Coolah's success, put it - *'its about social capital - you're stuffed if you have not got it'*.

Susie Brown has listed many illustrations of the high stocks of social capital in Coolah, namely:

- *'people feel part of the community'*
- *'they feel useful and help in a variety of community ventures and experiences'*
- *'they actually participate in community networks like public meetings, group meetings, working bees and social activities for raising money for charities'*
- *'high incidence of barter'*
- *'people feel valued and are told so'*
- *'cars are not locked'*
- *'children are minded by the community when in public spaces'*
- *'people know who will help them find out something'*

- **Effective fundraising strategies**. Over a four year period, Coolah has successfully secured $1.6m in outside funding for community projects. Each community achievement helped lift the profile of Coolah. Government departments and universities then wanted to partner with the community. However, what is more impressive has been the community's internal fundraising schemes. For example, the Coolah District Garden Group, a sub group of the Coolah District development have raised over $50,000 for the main street beautification project.
- **Partnership with local government**. The arrival of a new General Manager of the Shire, Shane Burns, occurred as revitalisation efforts were beginning. His personal commitment and ability to facilitate a council/community partnership with the community taking the lead, and council playing a resourcing role, has been invaluable. Council has certainly embraced community ownership and has become willing to invest in local economic development.
- **Marketing**. Coolah was fortunate to have the early combination of local newspaper operator, Gary Connelly, as initial chairperson and Eleanor Cook with her strong marketing and media background as their first coordinator. Together their skills contributed greatly to achieve a number of high profile events like 'Put Coolah Back on the Map' and 'Turn On the Lights for Coolah's Future', which helped gain widespread media attention. Coolah has been very effective in utilising local, regional, state and national media to highlight their achievements, an important strategy to keep locals aware and their motivation high.
- **Pride building events**. Besides having media profile value, Coolah through its huge community photo event, its garden fund raising events, spring clean up days and street party regularly created opportunities for locals to celebrate their achievements and have fun. In addition, such events also had a powerful by-product: in the words of Michael White, *'paradigm busting was achieved in the community by understanding that it was very important to have pride building events within the community'* (White 2000:1).

Today Coolah on a series of indicators has proved the power of self-initiative. Locals quote the following positives - unemployment rates have dropped, no empty shops, new businesses established, no houses for sale, almost impossible to rent and high numbers of candidates for recent council elections.

Locals have captured the spirit of action in Coolah in a variety of ways:

- *'Coolah realised that it needed to take control of its own destiny. What a difference good Australian country spirit can make'* (Eleanor Cook, initial Coordinator, Coolah District Development Group).
- *' Community development really works. We have proved to ourselves that you can take charge of your future and not just take what comes, but plan and implement a better future for yourself, your family and community'* (Michael White, farmer and

Deputy Chairperson, Coolah District Development Group).

- *'I came from Coolah last night - a new spirit of let's get in there and work in partnership with the government to tackle our future, to build a better future, and I think that's a very positive thing'* (John Anderson, local Federal Member of Parliament and Deputy Prime Minister, quoted on National Nine Network "Today Show", 25 June 2000).
- *'The key to the achievements and success enjoyed by the Coolah District Development Group has been the involvement and ownership by community members in the planning and implementation of the futures plan, coupled with Council's partnership role in resourcing the strategic direction of the development group. Councils often fail to recognise and apply this essential ingredient to community economic development, choosing instead to play a dominant leading role, resulting in the lack of support and commitment by the community, subsequently failing to achieve sustainable progress'* (Shane Burns, General Manager, Coolah Shire).

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F. Deloraine, Tasmania

Small Town Renewal
Change the future of your community

Deloraine is a small rural historic township of 2,100 residents, located in the Meander Valley, midway between Launceston and Devonport in North West Tasmania.

Deloraine was named 'the Australian Community of the Year' in 1997 by the National Australia Day Council - the only Tasmanian community to achieve this Award. In addition, Deloraine during the 1990s was the recipient of a series of both state and national awards for a range of community and economic development achievements.

Such achievements and recognition spring from the community's response to a host of challenges over the past 30 years, including community conflict, economic recession and a highway bypass. The 1970s saw the influx of a significant number of alternate lifestylers, and subsequent conflict with the 'loggers and woodchippers' and a division was apparent between 'the alternatives' and 'the establishment', between 'the labourers' and 'the artists', between the community 'workers' and the 'recipients' (McBain, 2000:1). In 1990, Deloraine was bypassed by Highway One, resulting in the closure of 12 businesses. And like many inland rural service centres, Deloraine has continually faced the challenges of rural recession and the impact of volatile commodity prices.

Deloraine has responded to these challenges with a variety of community inspired initiatives. In the words of their Mayor, Councillor Hall - *'it is a classic case of how a community of just over 2,000 people, faced with the same problems as most other rural centres, a rural depression, the closure of small traditional industries and job losses decided that the best way of solving the problem was self help. This positive attitude makes the town a model for the rest of the country'.*

Their achievements include:

- Utilisation of the Tidy Towns program as a catalyst in development. It commenced with the program in 1979 and in 1992, 1993 and 1995 won the State Award, the only Tasmanian community to win the Award three times with three different judges;
- Introduction of the annual Tasmanian Craft Fair in 1981 as a response to the divisions within the community. It began with 30 stall holders, and has now grown to involve over 200 craftspeople at 15 venues and the attendance of over 30,000 patrons. It is reputed to be the largest craft fair in the Southern Hemisphere, and the recipient of many Tasmanian tourism awards. The event now stimulates over $1 million into the local economy and generates over $100,000 profit per annum which is distributed to community organisations. Most of all, it has given the community a sense of pride and organisational confidence, and has contributed to many new settlers being attracted to the district's strong art, craft and community focus;
- Operation since 1987 of the model United Nations Assembly which involves annually 104 students representing 54 countries from 38 Tasmanian schools;
- Organisation of a party of celebration in 1990 in response to the Highway bypass, and subsequently a range of community actions related to signage, town entrance statements and attractive roundabouts to counter vehicle and visitor loss; the community raised $20,000 in two days to erect new signage;
- Formation of the Meander Valley Enterprise Centre in 1991 as a vehicle for the provision of a variety of supports for local business

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development and work training programs;

- Instigation of a variety of community beautification and park projects. One example, Rotary Park, has won the 'Best Outdoor Recreational Facility' in the National Heart Foundations Local Government Healthy Hearts Award. Council's Townscape Rate Incentive Scheme has encouraged local residents to improve and preserve their buildings;
- Inception of the Deloraine recycling and land fill site managed by Tasmanian Trash Transformers which now employs 10 people, provides consultation around the state and is regularly cited as a model for rural waste management in Australia. One of its creators is the recipient of the 'Young Achiever of the Year Award' and the program has won a State landcare award;
- Creation in 1995 of the Yarns 'Artwork in Silk' project, a magnificent portrayal of the Meander Valley on a 57 square metre hanging. Recipient of another State award project, it involved 300 local people contributing 10,000 voluntary hours. Besides being a major community project it taught many new skills to local residents. It is now a major tourist attraction, open to the public through the efforts of 40 volunteers;
- Development of Giant Steps, another local initiative that has achieved national and international prominence. Through a committee of parents and community supporters who refused to accept the lack of services for children with autism spectrum disorder, Giant Steps was created. It is modelled on a Canadian program, and involves the operation of the Giant Steps Tasmanian Education and Therapeutic Centre. It caters for 15 children including children from four families who have relocated from interstate to attend this school;
- Instigation of a wide range of tourism initiatives. This was rewarded in 1997 with the award as Tasmania's Premier Tourism Town.

And to the above list can be added a wide variety of initiatives related to youth development, hospital services, education, telecommunications, drama, arts child care and special event management.

Locals clearly articulate the reasons for their success and the above achievements. They consider the following essential ingredients:

- **Presence of a strong sense of belief, expectation and optimism**. The community has continually generated and implemented ideas, each endeavour feeding on previous success. Locals fondly call it *'the Spirit of Deloraine, a state of mind where people believe that they can achieve anything and change the world for the better'*. (McBain, 2000:2).
- **Tolerance of difference**. Deloraine is very tolerant of newcomers to the community. McBain (2000) again summarises this attitude well - *'there is now a camaraderie and admiration of individual skills and a celebration of differences and a willingness to co-exist. All of these people have retained their distinctive culture, they have adopted a broad self educational attitude and there is an air of tolerance in the community that is not common in the world'* (McBain, 2000:2).
- **Ability to network**. Deloraine sees its size (2,100 people in townsite, 5,500 in district) as ideal for a community to be able to network, and achieve maximum participation.
- **Strong focus on young men and women**. Young people are highly valued in the community, as is illustrated by the direct focus on youth events (eg, UN Model Assembly, Youth Drama Festival), youth infrastructure (eg, Youth and Community Centre), youth policy development (eg, Council has a specific strategic youth planning goal with performance targets, formulation of a Young People's Strategy), and youth and education program initiatives, (eg, Fast Track Life Education Project).
- **Leadership role of local government**. Council has always maintained a strong catalytic and facilitative role in community. Their early employment of a Community Development Officer, Glenn Christie was a significant factor in the awareness of community need and the initiation of a wide range of endeavours. The provision annually of $45,000 through community and special event grants has also played a catalytic role. Council undertakes a twelve

monthly resident opinion survey, which becomes a major performance indicator.

- **Celebration and fun**. Deloraine is a community with a tradition of celebration. There is a strong belief that project support is created and sustained when fun is a key ingredient. For example, on the seventh birthday of Trash Transformers the organisers wanted to say thanks to the community and organised a major party at the rubbish tip, and unveiled their commissioned 'Tales of the Tip' sculpture.

The spirit and enterprise of Deloraine is well captured by the following quotations.

- *'We are a bunch of pragmatists. We grab an idea and just run with it. No one is afraid of failure, and each endeavour feeds on previous success'* (Glenn Christie, Community Development Officer, Meander Valley Council);
- *'The spirit of Deloraine is a state of mind where people believe that they can achieve anything and change the world for the better'* (Michael McBain, Coordinator, Deloraine On-Line Project);
- *'The level of support required for a project like Giant Steps would not have been found elsewhere. There is a sense here that it is just going to work'* (Mick Clark, Board Member, Giant Steps);
- *'Deloraine is not a community that is content to sit back, complain about its lot in life, and call on others to help it develop and grow. It is a community that shows the way and meets any challenges head on and turns these into an opportunity'* (David Pyke, Executive Officer, Meander Valley Council);
- *'Deloraine is a strong community. Perhaps what we have done with 'Yarns' is create a physical, tangible result that can remind us of our ability to function as a healthy, creative community despite, or because of, our individual differences'* (Niecy Van der Elst-Brown, Artist Director, Yarns).

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G. Donald, Victoria

Donald (population 1800, district population 3200) is located on the edge of the Victorian Wimmera region in north western Victoria, 250km from Melbourne. Donald is essentially a rural service centre to a predominantly cereal/grazing agricultural region.

Like most dry farming regions, Donald struggled during the 1980s with low commodity prices exacerbated by droughts and mice plagues.

BUILDING INCENTIVE
$1500
CASH BACK

The local employment and economic situation was compounded by the closure of the Donald Meatworks (1980) with 60 families losing their livelihood. Also, historically Donald was a 'railway town', but through railway rationalisation, almost all rail jobs (50 jobs) were transferred to larger centres. Other State Government agencies such as Lands Department and Vic Roads also withdrew their services and jobs. Consequently, Donald faced the prospect of a declining and ageing population.

The trigger in terms of town response to the decline occurred in April 1985 when a public meeting was convened by the local shire to form a development group. The committee had three basic objectives:

1. To safeguard the businesses and services already in the town and district.
2. To develop new businesses and services in the area.
3. To investigate and utilise the various government funded programs to achieve 1 and 2.

The committee comprised shire councillors and representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, Victorian Farmers Federation, government departments and the community. The committee also appointed an honorary promotions officer, local business person, Graeme Harris.

Early initiatives included the following:

- Opening of a housing estate to attract new home buyers to the town - $2,000 prize was given to the first person to build a house using local contractors.
- Upgrading of aerodrome to accompany the Air Ambulance ($19,500 was raised in the community within 3 months).
- Commencement of an industrial estate – in 10 years, 20 business sites have been occupied.
- Attraction of a shirt making enterprise – Fairmark Company from Melbourne - which now occupies a refurbished church (purchased by the community with funds earmarked for new council offices), and now employs 25 people.
- Attraction of a variety of businesses including a men's barbershop, and confectionary distributor.
- Support for the establishment of the Pea Growers Cooperative in Donald which today involves 400 growers and has a turnover of $26 million and 14 employees.
- Relocation of a fibreglass factory from Melbourne. Eight Donald people made it happen through contributing $5,000 each.
- Support for local initiatives to enhance housing, ambulance station and nursing home facilities, all of which involved substantial local financial subscriptions.

In 1989 the Victorian state government introduced the Rural Enterprise Victoria Scheme (REV) which allowed small country communities to employ facilitators to develop and commercialise business ideas. Donald combined with several towns around them to form the Mid West Economic Development Committee, and employed Graeme Harris as their full time Facilitator. Graeme's role did not change significantly, except the area being covered increased.

The Donald Development Committee evolved into the Donald 2000 Committee in 1995 following council amalgamations. The local development groups have always had two simple goals to measure their success – people and jobs. Between 1985-95 population decline has been reversed. In terms of jobs, the group has helped 23 new businesses involving 100 jobs (Cahill, 1995:103).

In recent years Donald had continued to receive state and national media profile for its innovativeness in attracting people, business and jobs. Examples have included:

- Major Christmas shopping promotions which have resulted in substantial local shopping during a key retail period – last year fifty Donald traders contributed $300 each to assemble a total prize of $10,000 worth of goods from participating businesses. It was estimated it played a major motivating role in gaining and retaining $14 million in retail sales in a three month period.
- Following the success earlier in the year to attract an upholsterer and motor trimmer to town, Donald 2000 Committee engaged in a media campaign focusing on the quality of country living and opportunity, involving newspapers, radio and television to attract skilled tradespeople to the town. Since July 2000, over 400 enquires from skilled tradespeople and others wanting to relocate to the Donald District have been made. An attraction package consisting of $800 in relocation assistance, and six months free factory/shop rental has resulted in enquiries from a wide range of skilled people, including white goods mechanics, diesel mechanics, psychotherapists, glaziers and a French polisher. To gain support, interested tradespeople are required to submit a proposal to the town. In two months, 34 people have already moved into Donald, five new businesses opened up and the Primary School numbers were up by six.
- A campaign to have ANZ Bank reverse their decision to turn their branch into a sub agency. Donald 2000 Committee mobilised a campaign of negotiation and intensive media support, including a street rally involving 500 locals. The Bank reversed its decision. Donald 2000 Committee President Kerry Vogel summarised the impact – '*the ANZ bank admitted that they had never encountered a community as strong willed and united as Donald. We are the only town that has achieved such a result and all due to community spirit*'.

UPHOLSTERER - NEEDED
Brilliant business opportunity.
In a quality Country Town.

Donald 2000 Development Group has identified a business opportunity for a skilled upholsterer to operate a business.
Incentives available.
- Free rental premises for a period;
- Relocation costs and some set up costs are to be paid;
- Assistance with housing location.

Contact - Kerry Vogel 5497 1821
Graeme Harris - 5497 1300
ah 5497 1570

- Special Building Incentive Package. The local shire has an incentive package to stimulate the building industry – any new building is entitled to a three year rate free package if built by a contractor and two years if owner built. The Donald 2000 group also recently had a competition offering $1,500 for the next family house built to lock up stage in the townsite.

Key ingredients to the success of Donald's revitalisation identified by local people include:

- **Wake up calls**. With the systematic closure of services and job loss, the town opted for an 'I am going to take charge and take responsibility for the future' attitude. Previous Shire Secretary, Tom Bowles summarised it well – '*the philosophy has to be, that if you don't do something, its all going to disappear*'. In the words of

Graeme Harris - '*fear of losing our town spurred us on*'.

- **Motivated and entrepreneurial leadership**. Donald has always been fortunate in having individuals passionate about Donald and its future, and determined to make positive changes. They have combined to establish local development committees and generate the local entrepreneurial support necessary for development projects. Their role was well described by Graeme Harris – '*these people can see opportunities for growth within their communities, are optimistic, talk and consult with people for ideas, work with those ideas, make new people welcome in the community and support existing enterprises morally, whilst seeking financial support*'.
- **Local investment**. Donald has a long tradition of local people responding to the opportunity to invest in local business initiatives, and contribute to the creation of new civic infrastructure. For example, Kooka's Country Cookies was established in 1992 when five local people invested $5,000 each to support the dreams of an unemployed pastry cook. Today it employs 25 people, has an annual turnover of $1.5million and is currently undertaking an $850,000 building extension.

  Donald has also utilised public appeals resulting in a sealed airstrip, lights at the aerodrome, ambulance centre and sporting stadium. A nursing home and hospital redevelopments generated $1.75million.

  Donald also holds regular fund raising events for Donald 2000 projects – A Community Variety Concert and recording of a musical cassette are examples.
- **Identifying weakness/gaps in the local economy**. The Donald Development Groups have always been proactive in identifying economic leakage and business opportunities. Their 2000 campaign focusing on skilled trades and professions is an illustration of their approach.
- **Role of local government**. The old Donald Shire very much saw their role as facilitative rather than regulative. They were instrumental in establishing a local development group as well as seeking ways to contribute actively in development projects - grants, rate holidays, in kind contributions like earth works etc. The new amalgamated Shire of Buloke has continued this tradition, as well as ensuring there is professional staff attuned to the development focus - including a very proactive Manager for Business and Community Development as well as staff trained to expedite planning and design issues and offer financial advice.
- **Strong housing development policy**. Donald has always had incentives to build new housing. Besides recognising the value of high quality and expanding community housing stock, the community recognised the employment value in house building and having a strong building industry in the town. One of Graeme Harris' favourite quotes is '*did you know that building a house involves 25 different trades?*'. Similarly there has been a strong focus on aged accommodation - it keeps people in town and also releases homes for younger people.
- **Willingness to take risk and endure failure**. Donald over the years has supported an impressive range of entrepreneurial initiatives. Not all these projects have succeeded. Some businesses have failed, '*but it is a measure of the positive attitude of the community that failures are accepted and forgotten and "let's get on with some other opportunity"*' (Cahill, 1995:102)
- **Media support**. The local newspaper, *The Buloke Times* has always played a positive and supportive role to Donald initiatives. It has contributed greatly to enhancing community interest, awareness and the sense of excitement about what is happening in Donald. Donald has also been very active in utilising the outside media to broadcast their initiatives. A recent example was their tradesperson attraction campaign - all state newspapers and the ABC Today Tonight were utilised effectively to broadcast the message. These media opportunities, together with the campaign results created new momentum and excitement in the town. In the words of Kerry Vogel - '*it gave the town lift. The place is buzzing and it has led to a range of new community initiatives*'.
- **Generation of new ideas**. This idea generation process is a very important element. This is captured well by Cahill

(1995:101) - *'the success of such an action orientated group is largely dependent on a continual flow of new ideas and opportunities. The members of the Donald Development Committee travel far and wide to examine new opportunities or talk to new business people. The facilitator and some Council employees spend a lot of time investigating possible business opportunities that could be attracted to the area. Local business people have also developed the attitude of keeping an ear and eye open for new businesses'*.

Finally the following quotes capture the essence of the Donald story -

- *'The case study of the Donald Development Committee is a great example of what can be achieved when an active community group, together with a progressive, forward thinking local Council, combines to stimulate and initiate community self help projects. In this case, there have been key people who are in both groups and hence have been able to use their positions and influence to get projects underway'* (Greg Cahill, Social Researcher).
- *'We find it all very exciting - it gives you so many stories to write. You can feel in this town the excitement and interest. People are suddenly coming up with suggestions, left, right and centre'* (Robin Letts, Editor, The Buloke Times).
- *'The survival of our town is due to the people with their motto - "Never Say Die". They are progressive, forward thinkers who never let an opportunity pass. Their initiative, positive attitude and united community spirit have been an excellent foundation to build the survival and success of this small rural township'* (Graeme Harris).

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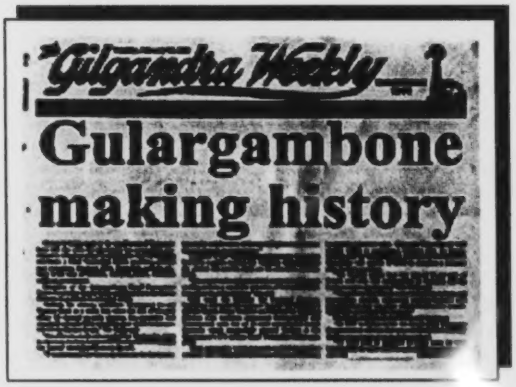
H. Gulargambone,
New South Wales

Gulargambone is a small rural village (town population 500, district population 1,000) within the Shire of Coonamble, central west, New South Wales. It is located 115 kms north of Dubbo on the Castlereagh Highway, midway between Gilgandra and Coonamble, in the western foothills of the Warrumbungle Mountains.


Gilgandra Weekly

Gulargambone making history

Through to the 1960s, Gulargambone was a thriving rural service community with a full complement of businesses and recreational services, including two banks, three general stores, a baker, two butchers and two stock agents. Like many small communities, the contraction of services began slowly in the 1970s, but by the late 1990s the speed of change accelerated greatly, and the community was left without a bank, accountant, doctor, chemist and even a newsagent.

Most recently, a series of events created 'crunch time' for the community, namely:

- announcement of the intended closure of the last financial institution in the town;
- the future of the post office became doubtful;
- financial failure of the local stock and station agency with significant financial loss for local investors;
- announcement by the State Government of the downgrading of the local hospital to a primary care station and the closure of long term stay bed arrangements.

These events acted as the catalyst that brought people together to plan and act for a positive future. Gulargambone residents decided to become architects of their own destiny.

For a number of years, Gulargambone had operated a local Development Committee which had instigated a series of small achievements. The seed for significant action occurred in September 1999, when the owner of the local cafe heard on a radio talk back show about a new federal government initiative - the Rural Transaction Centre (RTC) programme - and passed on this information to the Development Committee. They recruited others and the new action group quickly discovered that the programme represented an invaluable lifeline - the mechanism to reclaim the services they as a community had lost.

By February 2000, a community meeting of 320 people endorsed unanimously the developmental work of the committee to proceed with an application to create the Gulargambone Rural Transaction Centre.

The RTC program initially provided $10,000 for the preparation of a business plan, and then $200,000 to support the creation of a community owned business. The Gulargambone RTC opened in May 2000 and currently operates:

- a licenced post office,
- a Reliance Credit Union,
- a Centrelink agency,
- a Medicare Easyclaim,
- a gift shop/postshop,
- an internet centre (with four terminals),
- a signpost for ATO BAS,
- a giropost facility,
- a fax and photocopying service,

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- a courier service to Coonamble for drycleaning, lotto, RTA, prescriptions and photographic processing.

The Gulargambone community embraced the RTC as illustrated by the establishment of 185 local banking accounts within four months and extensive local usage of its range of services. Gulargambone also achieved national fame by being the first town to establish a community owned Post Office.

This rapid service transformation process achieved in Gulargambone, and its impact on the community, is well summarised by four key players:

- *'An opportunity was given by a government, embraced by an individual, adopted by a committee and supported by a community'* (Sandra Kelly, Secretary, Gulargambone RTC Committee);
- *'In my lifetime, RTC is the best initiative I have ever seen for small towns. For a long time Gulargambone was on a slide and feeling hopeless. RTC provided us with a lifeline. it provided a mechanism and resources for us to make things happen'* (John Giblin, Chair, Gulargambone RTC Committee);
- *'The Gulargambone community was struggling, but has a great fighting spirit. They got behind this RTC idea, and have really embraced it'* (Kellie Shiels, Manager, Gulargambone RTC);
- *'The RTC initiative was a huge visual success, which created new services, jobs, confidence and above all restated the belief that Gulargambone was a great place and worth fighting for'* (Ken Graham, RTC Committee Member and local shire Councillor).

The creation of the Gulargambone RTC was just the start for a range of other significant community building initiatives in year 2000, including:

- formation of Gulargambone Health Services Committee in response to State Government announcements about hospital closure. Their efforts over eight months not only saved the hospital, but led to a government announcement of a major local health service expansion through the creation of a multipurpose facility with additional beds;
- a 'support local businesses' strategy through the Business of the Month initiative and the introduction of a 'Gulargambone Dollars' shop local campaign;
- a 'Gulargambone in Focus' activity involving local residents identifying the 'best', 'unique', and most 'challenging' features of the community;
- the securing of $35,000 from Networking the Nation to establish an internet room at the RTC;
- the planning by the Gulargambone Day Care Sub Committee for the creation of a day care facility to be possibly located in the old post office residence;
- the establishment of the 'Gulargambone … Flying Ahead' project aiming at making Gulargambone a greater place to live and work. Already funding from the New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development has been secured to help undertake a community strategic planning process;
- the establishment of the Gulargambone 2001 Easter Reunion Committee which has secured $10,000 in funding from the New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development for event coordination and the theming of the town;
- instigation of the Christmas Lights project, hopeful of making Gulargambone the 'Brightest Little Town in Australia'.

Locals and outside supporters have identified the following factors critical in 'making things happen' in Gulargambone:

- **Passionate leadership**. This ingredient is well summarised by Sandra Kelly - *'find passionate people to form the committee. You will need passionate professionals, passionate tradesmen, passionate retirees, passionate sportsmen, passionate young mums, passionate farmers etc. As long as their first name is spelt P.A.S.S.I.O.N. count them in!!'* (Kelly 2000:6). The RTC planning exercise also enabled the infusion of new leaders, each of whom brought in their specific networks.

- **Sense of pride of place**. Locals are proud of being from Gulargambone. Again the words of Sandra Kelly - *'I am here because I choose to be, I believe in Gulargambone, its people and its place in the world. I am part of the new generation that believe that Gulargambone hasn't had its heyday, its having one. As a mother of 4, and a partner in a mixed farming business, my involvement in this project comes straight from my heart and I believe that is the essential ingredient in community development. Everyone of us striving to make our home town a better place to live, must have that PASSION to be successful. We must believe in ourselves and our communities, follow our dreams and share our ideas. I believe in Gulargambone, and feel comfortable singing its praises nationwide'*, (Kelly, 2000:2).

  That sense of pride is also reflected in the willingness of local people to invest in their community. The RTC has attracted widespread community support in terms of bank deposits and service use. Several local families have shown long term commitment to the community by investing in local infrastructure and new business initiatives including a café, concrete batching plant and English language school.
- **Community ownership.** That *'deep sense of community ownership'* are the words of Len Dowling (Director, Rural Transaction Centres, Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services) to summarise his assessment of Gulargambone's success. That ownership is reflected in the high levels of active community participation whether in public meetings (350 at February 2000 meeting), bank account membership and action group membership. The community ownership in Gulargambone is enhanced by the strong operational belief that when making decisions, as many people as possible need to be consulted and considered. The RTC is a community enterprise with all district residents being defined as shareholders and any profits directed to community needs by majority vote.
- **Broad based community involvement**. Community meetings and action group membership has reflected the wide spectrum of the community. Participation by the local Aboriginal community is a model for other communities. Aboriginal participation on both the RTC and Health Services Committee has been very active and significant, eg, when local Aboriginal people stated they wanted Aboriginal health funds to go into the new community multipurpose health facility instead of a separate health initiative, there was a significant change in government attitude toward Gulargambone.
- **Opportunism**. *'Opportunities often don't come twice'* and *'it won't just happen, we have to make it happen'* are popular phrases in Gulargambone. Community members saw the unique funding opportunity of the RTC program, and within a remarkably short period were personally presenting their application to politicians and bureaucrats in Canberra.
- **Use of the media**. The media has played a key role in raising the profile of Gulargambone and its achievements, both within and outside the community. Media contacts have been cultivated, and a regular press release fax stream created. National and international exposure through several television programs and print media have been invaluable both in terms of maintaining community pride and outside awareness.
- **Use of outside technical and funding resources**. RTC funding support has encouraged the community to utilise other funding sources, eg, recent approval of $16,000 from the New South Wales Government Townlife Development program for special event coordination and a strategic planning exercise.
- **Support from local member of parliament**. Local member and Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, has taken a strong personal interest in Gulargambone, and he and his electorate staff have actively participated in, and supported a variety of project developments. In the words of Ken Graham, local Councillor *'the political and practical support of our local member has been vital to our successes. John Anderson's contribution is simply brilliant'*.
- **Supportive local government.** The Coonamble Shire Council endorsed and assisted with the original application, provided bridging finance for the deposit to purchase the post office and deposited council funds within the new bank. The

active participation of the Mayor, Councillors and technical staff has been invaluable.

- **Professionalism**. Gulargambone has been determined to ensure the highest professional standards in terms of customer service, staffing and image in all their business dealings. This has obviously contributed to the continuing high levels of both local and outside support. Desire by committee members for continuing management training and support also reflects an awareness of the immensity of the task and uncertainty that still lies ahead, and the need for their own personal and collective professional growth and support.
- **Fun and positiveness**. Community leadership recognises the importance of ensuring enjoyment, fun, celebration and a focus on the positive are regular ingredients to counter burnout, staleness and that ever present rural capacity for cynicism and negativity.

Finally, some comments from Gulargambone locals:

- *'Revival is about partnership between individuals, communities and government. As a community we should actively search for, encourage and support individuals who can work as a team for the benefit of the community as a whole'* (Sandra Kelly);
- *'At the end of the year, we should reflect on how things were in the beginning. We were all a bit sceptical about what the future held for the delivery of essential services in our little town. At this time it is very important to recognise that services and businesses can stabilise and indeed improve if we all work together, support each other, think laterally, and concentrate on our strengths as a community. We should all be very proud'* (Gulargambone RTC Committee, Christmas Newsletter, 2000).
- *'It is all about convincing locals that we have a future - then Gulargambone will have a future'* (Ken Graham)

Perhaps in conclusion the famous George Bernard Shaw quote displayed in the local Kitchen Fare Café/Restaurant espouses the spirit of the community - *'You see things and you say why? But I dream things that never were: and I say 'why not?'*

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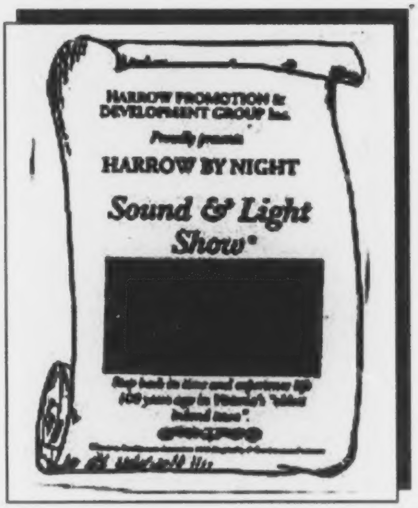
I. Harrow, Victoria

Harrow is a picturesque small town located on the banks of the Glenelg River within the Shire of West Wimmera, northwest Victoria. Harrow has the distinction of being the oldest inland town in the state of Victoria. Once a thriving settlement with two hotels, three general stores, shoemaker, flourmills, Chinese market gardens and a brickworks, today Harrow is home to only 90 residents.

The rural recessions during the last two decades were particularly hard on this community and led to out migration of people and businesses, leaving Harrow small and isolated.



HARROW PROMOTION &
DEVELOPMENT GROUP Inc.
Proudly presents
HARROW BY NIGHT
Sound & Light
Show*

In 1996, when the pastoral nun became the latest service to leave the town, the community started to think 'outside the box' in terms of initiatives to bring outside dollars into the community. Led by the young and dynamic publican of the local Hermitage Hotel, Angela Newton, the town has built upon their unique history and heritage streetscape, and created a unique weekly special event - the Harrow Sound and Light Show. The townsite of Harrow becomes the backdrop for a magnificent show, and sees up to 100 visitors each week. This event is the result of 50 local resident volunteers. The impact economically and in terms of enhanced community pride and confidence has been phenomenal.

Eve Lamb, correspondent with *The Standard* newspaper (19.08.2000) has captured the impact well - *'Something profound is happening in the sleepy river red gum hollow Harrow and it's got those further south sitting up and taking notice. At the historic Hermitage Hotel established in 1846 in the little western Victorian town, a clever plot has set tongues wagging and wallets flapping, quietly producing a local economic revolution.*

It's a plot that has taken a swag of locals, kitted them out in the garb of the colourful characters who peopled Harrow way back and let them loose to live it up with a gaggle of happy visitors creating one big party.

It's a party that has been happening every Saturday night now for the past four years - and Friday nights as well during October to December.
It's Harrow's nocturnal Sound and Light Show and it has been an indisputable success which appears to have significantly affected the tiny town's economic prospects for the better.'

In the words of Angela Newton, - '*Harrow was down to being a two keg a week place, and struggling ... it needed an outside income ... we looked within and identified our assets - location to other tourism product, its history as the oldest inland town in Victoria, and a cemetery full of great stories. With these assets we have scripted a story based on the town's heritage and folklore, and the rest is definitely history ..*'.

That was four years ago, and the initiative has gone from strength to strength. The Sound and Light Show is a community owned venture (The Harrow Promotion and Development Group) with all proceeds going directly back to the businesses and organisations within the town. Over the last 12 months, ticket sales alone have exceeded $200,000, let alone the outside expenditure that is being spent on accommodation, food and local tourism products.

Each show evening involves on average 100 visitors in summer and 70 in winter. They arrive at the town's Hermitage Hotel around 7.30pm. During a hearty 19th century style dinner in a fabulous setting, visitors begin to encounter yesteryear's resident bushrangers,

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explorers, doctor, wenches and undertaker who come alive again as up to 60 locals assume the persona and custom of their favourite historic characters. In the words of Angela Newton - *'We plucked the characters out of the graveyard. It's very liberating - if you can imagine the sort of stuff we can get away with because you are another character. We have so much fun with the audience that it's embarrassing'* (Lamb, 2000:4). The show is a clever mix of comedy, mayhem, mystery and fun that not only entertains, but educates the thousands of visitors each year about Harrow.

The show is a 'theatre on the move'. Following the meal guests are ushered through a variety of museum and tourist attractions in the main street, before boarding a coach for a sound and light experience through the darkened streets and into Harrow's historic past. Simply using car batteries and fires, the most humble heritage assets come alive. After a variety of audience participating street experiences, the show ends back in the hotel with a funeral, wake, singing and dancing. The quality of the evening's entertainment, and its inspiration to other small communities was evaluated well by a group of Western Australian participants on a Victorian small towns study tour, who ranked it as the best initiative they had viewed in a week of project site visits.

New business outcomes include a full time traditional blacksmith, two new bed and breakfast operations, new pizza and pasta weekend business, and marked increases in the occupation rates at the camping ground. Employment growth includes a new apprentice at the garage and a significant rise in casual employment opportunities.

Social outcomes include the enhanced pride, self esteem and confidence of local people, as well as the renewed mateship and sense of community that has emerged. Young people in particular, now find the community much more interesting, and it has allowed their active participation. Older members of the show cast report a marked improvement in their quality of life, while many families attest to the positive impact of the show by allowing them to play together. Harrow is truly a party town on weekends. The cast have learnt new skills in communication, organisation, presentation, marketing and public relations. Currently, the Harrow Promotion and Development Group are working with both local and State governments to develop stage two of the town's rebirth, namely an 'Aboriginal Cricketing Interpretative Centre'. This $400,000 initiative is based on the life of Johnny Mullagh, the famous Aboriginal cricketer who toured England in 1868 with the first international Australian cricket team, and who came from Harrow. He played professional cricket with the Melbourne Cricket Club, and how lies buried with his bat and stumps in the Harrow Cemetery.

Locals identify the following factors as contributing to the creation of their success:

- **Economic necessity**. The town was hurting economically, and Angela Newton states simply that the motivating factor behind the concept was very simple - *'poverty - we badly needed an outside cashflow and the economic benefit has been phenomenal'*.
- **Importance of success**. The enthusiasm of visitors, the economic impact on local businesses and new business start ups have all combined to give local people a sense of confidence in their ability to make a difference.
- **The fun ingredient**. Besides the tangible economic returns, the show is sustained by the enthusiasm of local people. To maintain over 50% active resident participation over 4 years is outstanding. It is explained in the words of the local garage operator, Bernie Kelly - *'some people ask how do you keep all of the volunteers interested, and I tell them if you look at them you notice they are having more fun than the visitors'* (Lamb, 2000:5).
- **Asset led development**. The initiatives pursued by local people are firmly based on the simplicity of the asset base of the town - heritage streetscape, historic folklore, famous sons and daughters, nearby tourism attractions, (eg, Coonawarra Vineyards, Grampians, Great Ocean Road) and the fact that 150,000 people live within two hours drive.
- **Outside technical assistance**. The Harrow Light and Sound show is very much a product of the vivid imagination and determination of local people. The only tangible outside assistance was via a $20,000 grant from Business Victoria to develop a business plan. In the words of

Angela Newton - '*the plan showed us where we are, where we can go and how we can get there. The ideas for the future are down on paper and not just in one or two people's heads. It has given Harrow people the confidence to further develop their ideas'*.

The impact and achievements of the Harrow Light and Sound Show upon the town of Harrow are captured well by the following quotes.

- *'It certainly is quite humbling at times to see what a small community can do for itself when the going gets tough... Harrow has become a benchmark for rural development. It has been a really great lesson for other communities. If a town like Harrow with a population of just 90 can do this, anyone can do anything. I'm not saying other towns should have a sound and light show, but every town has its unique assets to develop... I am a firm believer that people in the bush today must shake off this 'victim attitude' that they so fondly hide behind. There is very little that guts and hard work can't accomplish. It is time for small communities to realise that their destiny and that of their children lies within themselves. Instead of dwelling on what can't be done take a look at what must be done, and stop looking towards local and State Government to come to the rescue'* (Angela Newton, publican, Hermitage Hotel, Harrow);
- *'This pro active group have clearly shown what a small band of people can achieve in a small community such as Harrow, they have led by example, and their success can be measured by the results they have achieved over the past few years. As a promotional group they are playing a major role in the development of tourism in the North West Grampians Region, and we congratulate them on their achievements and thank them for their contribution to this region. If all communities in this region had the same dedication and ambition that has been shown by the Harrow Promotion and Development Group, and achieved the same results, we would undoubtedly have the leading tourism region in Australia'* (Dennis Witmitz, Executive Officer, Horsham and District Commerce Association);
- *'I am 15 years old and a very proud volunteer of the "Harrow By Night Sight And Sound Show". I have been a volunteer since I was 12. The show has given me the confidence to face an audience of people, to public speak and the ability to mix with a variety of people and cultures. I have also learnt a lot about the history of my town and the type of people who existed in the 1800s. The cast of the light and sound show have a very strong bond. We all support each other in our character roles as well as in our personal lives. The "Harrow By Night Sound And Light Show" has bought the people of Harrow together and to show that Harrow does exist and what a great town it is'* (Alicia Zwar, local young person);
- *'It has bought us together as a community. I'm still here, I wouldn't be otherwise. It's made the difference between staying and going. The whole town was going downhill otherwise'*. (Bernie Kelly, local car museum operator).

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J. Hyden,

Western Australia

Hyden is located within the Shire of Kondinin, approximately 320 kms east of Perth. It is the location of the international tourist icon called Wave Rock. Hyden is home to 400 ratepayers and a community of interest of 800 people, who through a range of innovative actions are determined to make its town entrance sign ring true - 'Bush Living at Its Best'.

Two national correspondents summarise well the state and spirit of Hyden. Asa Wahlquist (1999a) *Australian Newspaper* writer stated - *'out near the rabbit proof fence is the small wheatbelt town of Hyden, ... the bank opens one day a week, there is no full time police service, nor a high school. It is the sort of town that demographers expect to die. The locals have other ideas'*. Jane Sandilands (1997:5) author for the *National Community Link Magazine* has made this statement - *'Today, Hyden describes itself as 'thriving', with 99 per cent of its adult population employed largely by privately owned small businesses. It has three football teams, two netball teams and a tennis club with a membership of 120. It has facilities that are the envy of much larger towns, a 60 bed motel and convention centre, a communications hub in its Telecentre, and the prospect of an airfield to land 737 aircraft. Almost all the people of Hyden are involved in one or more volunteer organisations or activities.'*

At the recent national Regional Australia Summit, Hyden was the only town case study invited to present. For the last three years, Hyden has been recognised for its achievements as a community by being a finalist in Western Australia's 'Most Enterprising Rural Community Award' (Progress Rural WA). President of their Progress Association, Jane Mouritz, was recognised in 2000 as the Western Australian Royal Agricultural Society/Countryman Rural Achiever of the Year for her leadership in Hyden's revitalisation. Hyden is probably the most talked about small town in Australia.

The vision statement of Hyden captures the attitude and spirit behind their success - *'to nurture local leadership, teamwork, positive vision and initiative to improve community resources and facilities for all community residents, and, to work cooperatively with determination and hard work to ensure that existing and new rural based businesses, tourism and agriculture are modern and productive, and will have a thriving and sustainable long term future within Hyden's vibrant and forward looking community'*.

The following examples of initiatives of the Hyden community over the last four years are illustrative of the 'can do' spirit of the community:

- Publication of both weekly and monthly newsletters as free information resources to keep their community fully informed.
- Creation of 'Help Hyden Prosper' campaign to encourage local support for the 46 small businesses in Hyden to cope with the worsening local credit squeeze and the negative effects of GST.
- Formation of the Hyden Business Development Company involving 23 shareholders who have invested $10,000 each to establish new business and employment opportunities - currently they have built two commercial premises and a house and have supported an auto electrician, a plumber, a metal fabricator and their families to establish themselves in Hyden; the group has also accessed three phase power for Hyden's light industrial area and are now extending the metal fabricator's premises and supporting the business manager in his deal with a Canadian tillage machinery company to make Hyden the national assembly and

distribution base for imported equipment.

- Construction of the Hyden Resource and Telecentre comprising a school library, town library, telecentre, community art room, newspaper offices and public meeting rooms. Recently the building was doubled in size.
- Establishment of a local beef producers marketing cooperative under the banner of Wave Rock Prime Beef - a quality driven initiative aimed at making Hyden the 'Beef Capital of the Wheatbelt' and maintaining top prices.
- Construction of an innovative 'bush' shopping centre. This is a $600,000 local investment initiative which has created 6 new speciality shops, a post office and two bank premises.
- Progress towards the creation of a Hyden Community Bank funded by local shareholders.
- Erection of the Hyden Progress Young Singles accommodation - 10 modern rental units targeting young people and their specific needs.
- Construction of a retirement village, and progress towards the establishment of a senior's recreation centre.
- Employment of a Community Resource Coordinator to encourage and support both young people and senior citizens to participate more fully within the community.
- Expansion of local tourism infrastructure with the construction of a lake side resort and a regional airport facility.

The ingredients identified by locals to account for the vibrance of Hyden include the following:

- **Existence of an appropriate development vehicle**. The Hyden Progress Association since 1947 has provided leadership for both community and economic development, and is described by its current President as an organisation *'driven by the community, for the community'*. It and the Hyden Sports Council have long been viewed as community management forums, meeting regularly and encouraging local discussion on all issues affecting Hyden's community and its future.
- **Organisation of regular community planning and dialogue events**. Since 1992, these interactive sessions have given community members an opportunity to share and prioritise future action. Initiatives such as the young singles accommodation, Hyden Resource and Telecentre, Hyden Bush Bakehouse and the Hyden Business Development Company are examples of projects first raised as a community planning initiative. Also as community controversy has arisen (eg, conflicts over recent shopping centre development and location of youth centre), the Progress Association has shown leadership by convening community meetings to resolve the differences. Similarly, the Progress Association has organised events like the recent Hyden Hair Raiser that enabled 86 local people to share in a weekend of fun, communication, negotiation, leadership, adventure activities, problem solving and team building. In the words of Jane Mouritz '*the weekend aimed at nurturing community spirit and also rewarded the many local volunteers who work so hard and so often for Hyden and surrounding towns*'.
- **Utilisation of local advantages**. The recognition by local farmers in the 1960s of the uniqueness and attractive capacity of Wave Rock, led to the development of one of the state's tourism icons. Its tourism appeal is a result of locals recognising its value and investing in the infrastructure necessary to become a national and international destination.
- **Willingness to invest in local initiatives**. So much has been achieved locally because community members have been prepared to commit their own financial resources. In the mid 1960s, the tourism industry (now a multi million dollar industry employing over 60 people) was established by a group of local farmers willing to invest in diversification via tourism by contributing seventy pounds each. The Hyden Development Company was made possible by a $10,000 contribution by each of 23 local farmers, and the new $600,000 shopping centre and the lakeside resort are being funded by local investors.
- **Smart use of outside resources**. Hyden has developed a reputation for being fully aware of possible outside resources - financial and technical. Examples include their creative use of the Rural Community program (for

Community Resource Officer), the Small Town Economic Program (for community planning and establishment of the Hyden Business Development Company) and the Ministry of Housing (young singles accommodation). The recent $150,000 extension to their Telecentre was a result of funding from the Lotteries Commission, Shire of Kondinin and Agriculture WA. In particular, their linkage to the technical and funding support of the State Department of Commerce and Trade has been invaluable in both identifying and developing opportunities.

- **Strong support for local businesses**. 'Help Hyden Prosper' campaign is typical of the focus placed on supporting existing businesses, and facilitating new business life. In the 18 months to July 1998, records show that Hyden established 13 new businesses and saw 17 existing businesses expand.
- **Warm welcome to newcomers**. The friendliness of this community to new residents and businesses is reflected in such initiatives as new resident 'welcome baskets', celebration dinners for new residents and provision of certificates of appreciation to all new businesses.
- **Focus on young people**. Hyden has consistently sought to create a 'youthful' community by focussing on the issues that will attract and retain young people - employment, recreation, participation and housing have all been priorities. This is reflected in recent initiatives like the construction of the Youth Centre, employment of a Community Resource Officer, organisation of an annual celebratory event for rural youth called 'Hyden's Harvest Bash', creation of quality sporting facilities, maintenance of a youth friendly hotel and the focus on youth employment initiatives. Approximately one third of all new businesses established during 1998-1999 are operated by young people, under 30 years old. Their determination to maintain connection with their young people who depart the community for secondary and tertiary education is reflected in a variety of initiatives, including the automatic weekly emailing of their newspapers to every student studying away.
- Finally, **the renowned Hyden 'energy and attitude'** is acknowledged as vital in keeping this small rural community moving forwards, utilising team work and resourcefulness to make things happen despite difficult economic times. Hyden people are interested in progress and the maintenance of a high quality of life, and realise that as a community they need to be continually opportunist in providing the social and economic environment required to keep people living and working in wheatbelt Western Australia.

The spirit of Hyden is captured by the following quotes:

- '*There's a saying that has kept the Hyden Progress Association going for at least 50 years - 'if you do nothing, nothing will happen. If you do something, something might happen'*.' (Jane Sandilands, 1997:6)
- '*It's what you do for nothing that makes the difference*' (Sheenagh Collins, Wave Rock Hotel/Motel)
- '*Always momentum - things are happening all the time. It's what makes it so exciting to live here*' (Marie Di Russo, Chairperson Telecentre)
- '*We will not compromise because we live out on the rabbit proof fence*' (Sheenagh Collins, developer, local shopping centre)
- '*We celebrate regularly - we always have a bottle of champagne ready to pop*' (Jane Mouritz, President, Hyden Progress Association)
- '*Hyden is a classic example of a rural community that has grabbed an opportunity and used it to the hilt'*. (Harry Butler, Environmentalist)

Hyden views itself as a 'Self Help Town' whose people and enterprises continue to lobby, to challenge and introduce new energy and ideas into the social, community, business and economic infrastructure. Locally it is referred to as 'opportunity readiness!

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66A

K. Kulin,
Western Australia

The community of Kulin is located 283 kms east of Perth.

The Shire of Kulin, covering nearly eight thousand kilometres, has a total population of 1,100 with 300 being resident within the townsite of Kulin.

Greg Hadlow, CEO Kulin Council (left) and Graeme Robertson, Chair, Community Bank celebrate the opening of the town's own bank.

The transformation they have seen in their community has been captured by Peacock, (1998:41) - *'Five years ago, Kulin was a town in trouble. Like many others, the small community in the south eastern Wheatbelt was feeling the recessionary squeeze. Combined with low commodity prices and the withdrawal of services to regional centres, it was make or break time for Kulin folk. They decided to make it, and in the process have transformed their town from a nondescript dot on the map to the home of the Kulin Bush Races'*. The transformation and their new found confidence and pride is epitomised well in their chosen logo - 'The Capital of the Wheatbelt'.

In 1994, concerned by the ebb and flow of businesses and population in their community, a Futures Workshop was held with the theme - 'Where is Kulin Going? Don't put your future in the hands of others - take control of your own destiny!'. Facilitated and organised by the Shire of Kulin, Eastern Districts Business Enterprise Centre, Wheatbelt Development Commission and the I.D.E.A.S. group, the event attracted fifty residents. The event focused on their vision for Kulin, and actions to achieve that vision. It simply had participants examine four key questions:

- Who are we?
- What have we got?
- What do we want?
- How do we get it?

The overall conclusion by participants at the event was the need to raise the profile of Kulin with the twin aims of attracting more people to the community as settlers and visitors, and giving local people a renewed sense of ownership and pride in their community. The event was highly successful, and resulted in a series of prioritised areas for action.

It also motivated local people to become involved in implementing specific initiatives. A series of subgroups with convenors was established, and an umbrella group - The Cultivating Kulin Committee - was created.

The community has established the following vision statement - *'To sustain and improve the local community through positive opportunities for business and quality of life. The community must lead activities, which will develop and increase the profile of Kulin and attract people to the district. The community must embrace initiatives to preserve existing businesses and services in the district. The community must remain proactive and consider all new ideas and initiatives'*.

Achievements since that Community Futures event six years ago have been many and continuous:

- Formation of *The Kulin Cultivator* newspaper as an effective means of intra community communication.
- Design of initiatives to enhance the identity of Kulin, including Captain Kulin as a

community mascot - a life like grain of wheat promoting Kulin. Captain Kulin and the 'Capital of the Wheatbelt' captions now appear in entrance signs, brochures, number plates, clothing etc.'

- Introduction of the Kulin Bush Race event in 1995 as their major event attraction. This has grown from strength to strength both in terms of visitor numbers, and the related events and attractions within the community. The event is now an icon event, and Western Australia's version of the Birdsville Races. Kulin Bush Races is now a weekend event involving gymkhana, art and craft show, food hall, wine bar, kids activity tent, sheep, camel and dog racing, two up, cow pat lotto, MacDonald's Farm, and the Great Aussie Revival Breakfast. The event has been a finalist in the Western Australia Tourism Awards for the past four years and represents the only Accredited Tourism Event in Western Australia.
- Creation of the Tin Horse Highway - farmers and townspeople have designed tin horses to adorn the entrances to Kulin and particularly the road to the Kulin Bush Races. Their vision is to develop the Tin Horse Highway as an alternative route to the tourist icon, Wave Rock.
- Implementation of a town beautification strategy which has seen considerable main street improvements including new public amenities and a flow on effect to shopfront and private garden improvements.
- Instigation of an accommodation strategy which has seen the building of new houses and retirement units as a means of retaining retiring locals, attracting back ex-residents and enticing new residents. The introduction of a $20 per town block scheme has seen the attraction of 38 new residents in four years. The introduction of singles and backpacker accommodation at the caravan park has increased accommodation options.
- The opening of the Kulin Community Bank - following the closure of the last bank in Kulin in 1998, residents pledged funds to enable West Australia's first community bank to be formed in October 1999. The bank establishment is typical of how projects happen in Kulin - in a hectic 15 week period following the decision to own and operate their own bank, an interim Board of Directors received the required community pledges for $270,000, hired staff, leased premises and issued a prospectus!.
- The establishment of a Multi Purpose Health Service incorporating the first tele health unit in the state.
- The adoption of business development programs like Business Retention and Expansion and Aussie Host to enhance local business performance. Kulin has pioneered such initiatives in wheatbelt Western Australia.
- Operation of a fundraising initiative to purchase a community bus.
- Establishment of a Telecentre and library through conversion of the Community Centre.
- Development of a new recreation centre.
- Establishment of a personalised advertising campaign to encourage parents to send their students to the local high school.
- Focus on enhancing options for local young people through the purchase of a water slide (identified by young people as their top priority), expansion of local school curriculum to incorporate more additional Year 11 and 12 subjects, introduction of opportunities for leadership experiences and the creation of the Kulin Kids Klub.
- Appointment of a Community Information Officer to establish guidelines and plans on development opportunities in Kulin and the region, and ensure that residents are aware of services available.

The above achievements during the last six years have certainly created a most positive legacy for Kulin, including:

- stabilisation of the town's population
- a proactive self help tradition
- strong support for local businesses
- enhanced state and national profile
- greater community pride and confidence
- increased numbers of visitors and visitor expenditure
- improved levels of community participation and access to decision making
- local control of banking facilities

- generation of considerable financial resources
- full range of health and community services

The ingredients identified by locals that have made this transformation possible include:

- **A sense of necessity**. The Kulin community recognised that it could not sit back and hope circumstances would improve. They recognised the need to be proactive. They also recognised that they were not a government service centre, so they needed to be creative in terms of employment and business development.
- **A facilitative local government**. Kulin Council has provided the necessary leadership and a willingness to take risks both at councillor and staff levels.
- **Presence of local leadership and a commitment to leadership renewal**. Kulin has been fortunate in having an ever growing number of people willing to become involved with community responsibility. As a town they have regularly committed themselves to leadership development events and opportunities.
- **Community pride and excitement**. Kulin residents feel a strong sense of pride about Kulin's past and contemporary achievements. The Kulin Bush Race event and the 'Tin Horse Highway' are key sources of pride, and excitement. The excitement is a strong sense of motivation for people wanting to be part of what is happening. The significant donations from locals (eg, the donation from the Freebairre Estate and its $1 million legacy) is also illustrative of the willingness of locals to give back to their community and the enhancement of community facilities.
- **Commitment to planning processes**. Kulin has become committed to the planning process. Community planning events, sport and recreation needs study and the recent five year plan by the Council are illustrations of this commitment to process.
- **Inclusive community experiences**. Levels of social capital are strong in Kulin. This is illustrated in numerous ways. Firstly, there is a strong bond between 'townies' and farmers about their common future, and the need for a strong town service centre (not necessarily the norm in rural Australia). Secondly there is a strong commitment to partnership, especially between local council and the community. Finally, the high levels of volunteer involvement enable the functioning of initiatives like *The Kulin Cultivator* and the Kulin Bush Races. The high levels of participation are partly explained by the sense of excitement and achievement created through the success of their numerous initiatives.
- **Willingness to invest local resources**. The creation of Western Australia's first community bank was made possible simply because of the money and time contribution that locals were prepared to give. A strong 'self help' spirit permeates the community.
- **Commitment to local business development**. Kulin has recognised the need to retain and strengthen their local business community. The creation of a Community Bank was partly motivated by their recognition that without a local banking facility, there would be considerable leakage of local dollars to the new banking town. A key driving force behind the Kulin Bush Race event is the knowledge of the economic spin off it provides to local business. Commitment to participation in programs like Aussie Host and Business Retention and Expansion are further examples of the focus on the need to retain and grow local business.

The spirit of Kulin and its level of achievement are best summarised by the words of local people:

- '*Besides my family and farm, Kulin is the most important thing in my life, and there is a lot of Kulin people with the same feeling. Our aim is to get everyone feeling that way, and then we will be unstoppable*'. (Graeme Robertson, Chair, Community Bank)
- '*To not do anything is to go backwards and that is not an option*' (Graeme Robertson, Chair, Community Bank)
- '*Almost a century later we can still go to the Bush Races at Kulin once a year thanks to the vision, the energy and the contributions of almost every member of the entire community. If you raise an arm there's a job for you in what has turned out to be*

Kulin's biggest ever community effort, which happened to come along when the shire desperately needed a lift in morale. Rather than welcoming new enterprises the proposal for a trial country race meeting was the shot in the arm everyone needed. And, with a push here, and a nudge there it finally came to pass'. (Stan Gervas, Town historian, 1999)

- *'To us Kulin is "the capital of the wheatbelt", and we must keep working to improve our businesses and amenities, firstly for ourselves, but also to encourage others to visit us'*. (Wendy Gangell, president, Cultivating Kulin Committee)
- *'Small towns must have a sense of pride. Kulin has and this shows through in times of hardship and prosperity'*. (Greg Hadlow, CEO, Shire of Kulin)

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L. Mitchell, Queensland

Mitchell (population 1,200), the principal town of the Shire of Booringa, is situated on the Warrego Highway, 560 kilometres west of Brisbane. Over the last two decades, as an agricultural service centre in a traditional cattle and sheep district subject to long periods of drought, the community has seen the decline in government services, business life and population (especially young people).

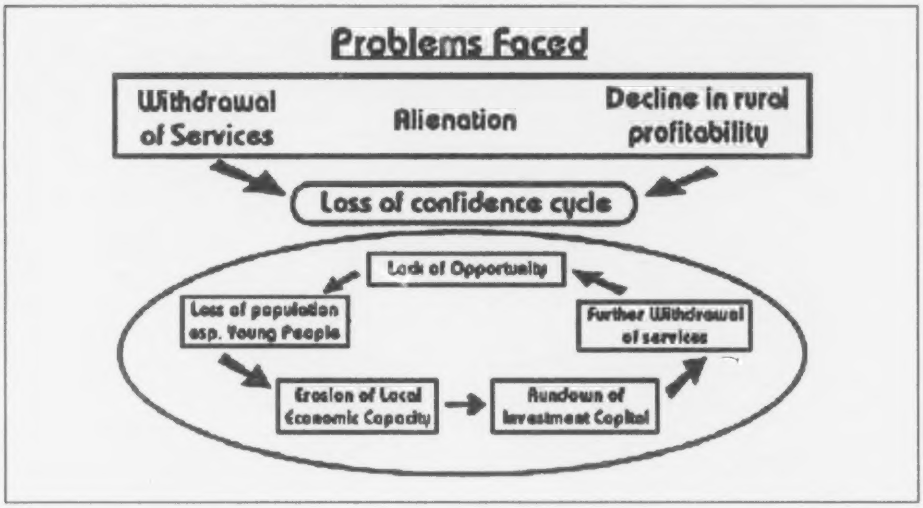
MAJOR
MITCHELL
CARAVAN PARK
2 NIGHTS FREE
OF CHARGE

Shire of Booringa - population Census figures

	1986	1991	1996
Total population	2,297	2,151	1,934
15-19 years old	7.7%	6.7%	4.6%
20-24 years old	8.8%	7.7%	6.9%
25-29 years old	8.7%	8.4%	7.4%

However, the community has developed a national reputation for its revitalisation efforts, as evidenced by its selection as a highlighted case study during the Regional Australia Summit (October 1999). It has been very creative in its efforts to diversify its local economy, especially though tourism and value adding enterprises, and promote a more positive future for its young men and women through a comprehensive youth development strategy.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Booringa Shire Council, Jeff Watson used the following two diagrams at the Regional Australia Summit to capture the challenges faced by the community, and the response required.


Problems Faced
Withdrawal of Services
Alienation
Decline in rural profitability
Loss of confidence cycle
Lack of Opportunity
Loss of population esp. Young People
Further Withdrawal of services
Erosion of Local Economic Capacity
Rundown of Investment Capital

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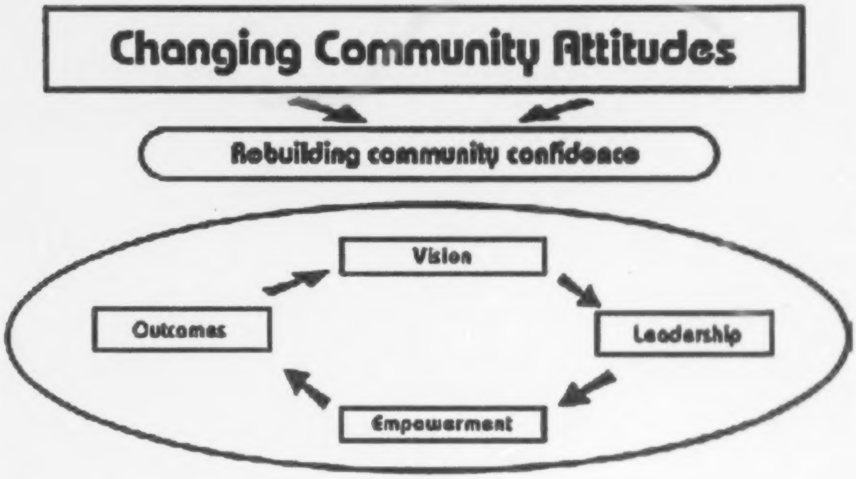

Breaking The Downward Spiral

(Watson, 2000:1,2)

Important milestones in Mitchell's revitalisation process include the following:

- 1990 - closure of Court House and railway employment reductions;
- 1991 - formation of the Booringa Action Group (BAG) as a vehicle for local development. BAG was one outcome of one of the first Future Search Workshops in Queensland conducted by Doug Martin of the State Department of Business, Industry and Regional Development. The Future Search Conference was the first of a number of such community planning events held during the 1990s in Mitchell;
- 1994 - construction of the Mitchell RSL and Combined Sports Club as a premier sporting facility;
- 1995 - employment of Sue Middleton as the first full time development officer who gave momentum to community economic development;
- 1996 - the Kenniff Courthouse was redeveloped as a tourism centre;
- 1997 - foundation of a Community Reference Group, and
- foundation of the Booringa Shire Youth Council;
- 1998 - employment of Brian Arnold as Manager, Entrepreneurial Marketing Services who immediately developed a proactive entrepreneurial approach to development. 1998 also saw further initiatives in tourism with the opening of an extended Caravan Park and Great Artesian Spa;
- 1999 - further development of the Spa into a resort concept and a major youth employment program, and the establishment of several new enterprises with council financial support;
- 2000 - launching of another youth enterprise project - a river boat cruise.

A number of the key initiatives need elaborating:

- Business attraction - ideas for new industry are sourced and researched, and if viable, the Manager of Entrepreneurial Marketing Services simply cold calls businesses and explains the benefits of locating, re-locating or expanding to Mitchell. Such an approach is being used to attract a business producing products from cypress pine waste. This business will eventually employ over 30 people.
- Community economic development - over the years, idea generation workshops have led to a number of local success initiatives - the Manager, Entrepreneurial Marketing Services also researches opportunities and

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promotes them to the community.

- Tourism development - the community has continuously worked on enhancing its range of tourism products and appeal especially as the gateway to the outback. Initiatives have included a tourist information centre in the old Courthouse, art gallery, cinema, museum and library complex; horse drawn wagon tours; television marketing campaign; Major Mitchell River Cruises, Fountain of Youth Trek and development of the Major Mitchell Caravan Park which entrepreneurially markets itself with two free nights accommodation. The biggest attraction in town is the Great Artesian Spa complex which consists of a hot water and still water pool, fitness centre, internet café (the 'Health Byte Café'), massage services, retail store, beauty therapist and sporting hire service (bicycles, golf clubs).

  The Spa is the largest open air spa in Australia, and the source of numerous awards over the last year - Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation, Tidy Town Award for the Best New Tourist Attraction, the Outback Queensland Tourism Authority Award for Significant Regional Attraction and a high recommendation in the Queensland Healthy Hearts Local Government Awards.
- Value adding initiatives. Their Manager, Entrepreneurial Marketing Services has been responsible for creating/conjuring ideas for products or service that value add to local assets, and help enhance the profile of the town, eg, Great Artesian Bottled Water (*'from the water that dripped off the dinosaurs back'*), Fossil Ale, marketing of local arts and crafts on the internet, Australia Outback Bush Pig etc.
- Booringa Shire Youth Council - the mission statement of this group summarises its comprehensive role - *'to provide a higher quality of life for young people and to promote a more positive image of young people in the Booringa Shire. In doing so, the Booringa Shire Youth Council will endeavour to provide leadership, guidance, positive experiences and opportunities as well as encouraging greater community participation'.*

The achievements emanating from the Mitchell community's efforts are obvious, and well summarised by their Council CEO -

- *'exponential growth in tourism;*
- *marked rise in the community's expectation of success;*
- *substantial strengthening of the local business base;*
- *substantial diminishing of the effects of rural decline on our community'.*

(Watson, 2000:4)

Locals would identify the following as important elements within their revitalisation story -

- **Wake up call**. In 1990, the distress emanating from the closure of the Courthouse, reduction in railway employment and loss of power maintenance workers was compounded by the Queensland Deputy Premier appearing in town and mouthing the following message - *'the sooner you move to the nearby regional centre of Roma the better you will be. Within 10 years you will not be here'*. In the words of one local - *'after 30 years of being kicked and having things taken away, we decided it was time to fight back and make things happen ourselves'.*
- **Community planning events and outside facilitation**. The events of 1990 led directly to the interest in holding a community planning workshop, and the first 'Future Search Workshop' in Queensland was held in Mitchell in 1991. Besides generating a range of ideas, the event also motivated people to take responsibility for their own future and get involved in the town. In the words of one organiser *'this was the first time people thought about what was positive about Mitchell'*. It also led to the creation of the Booringa Action Group. Since 1991 there have been a number of community planning events. As one local councillor put it - *'we sensed a continuous challenge to come up with new ideas'*. The importance of having outside skilled facilitators has been identified as vital to encouraging broad based participation and consensus decision making.
- **Council leadership and professional staff**. Leadership by council in terms of economic development has been vital. *'Council has a*

progressive image and have shown they are willing to take some risks' (Manager, Entrepreneurial Marketing Services). Council have demonstrated their commitment to the economic revitalisation through their regular investment, eg, expended $60,000 on television marketing, $500,000 on developing the Caravan Park, $200,000 equity in the bottled water plant. Also there is strong recognition of the leadership role of Council CEO, Jeff Watson, and his local connection - *'having a CEO born and bred in the district helps a lot*'.

The council has also been prepared to be innovative in terms of staff appointments. When local initiatives did not take off initially, there was recognition of the need for a 'professional pair of arms and legs' and the Shire of Booringa was one of the first councils to employ an Economic Development Officer. This move has returned over $750,000 in outside funding alone. The Shire Council has also appointed a Manager of Entrepreneurial Marketing, a clear commitment to the council's proactive approach to business development.

- **Booringa Action Group**. This local development group has played an important role. It has given local people an idea generation forum and local government a sounding board for feedback and a means to access community based funding.
- **Business development focus**. The community has continually engaged in initiatives that seek to attract, develop and retain local business. The motivation behind their tourist initiatives is to hold visitors as long as possible within the community, recognising that this must be good for expenditure on local products and services. Their support for Young Achievement Australia programs at the local school level emanates from a belief that the *'only way to develop rural communities like Mitchell is by developing entrepreneurs'* (Manager, Entrepreneurial Marketing Services).
- **Tourism focus**. Given Mitchell's location, natural advantages and the growing popularity of the outback, tourism was an obvious industry sector to develop. Mitchell in fact has become a tourist destination and resort. The spa complex has had a dramatic effect and certainly has *'put the town on the map'* (local business person). The two free nights at the caravan park *'sounds corny, but boy, it has worked - it also has put us on the map. It certainly locks people into the town, and we business people are seeing the positive effects'* (local business person).
- **Youth focus**. The community has been very supportive of their council's numerous efforts to enhance employment and social opportunities for young people - appointment of a youth worker, establishment of a youth council, creation of 11 trainee positions within council workforce... The spa complex has played a vital role giving young people a sense of pride about the quality of their facilities and enabling them to feel there are meaningful employment and training options within the town. The spa also generates 25 employment positions.

Finally, some comments by locals on the Mitchell process:

- *'No one was going to make it happen unless we wanted it to happen'* (Rob Cornish, President, Booringa Action Group);
- *'We should all realise now, that no government is going to come galloping in on a white charger to save the bush. Hard work, positive attitudes, sound business skills, and innovation are the only means by which that can be achieved'* (Jeff Watson, CEO, Shire of Booringa);

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M. Oatlands, Tasmania

Oatlands (population 500) retains the character of a nineteenth century town. Oatlands has the largest collection of colonial sandstone buildings in a village situation in Australia. Its main street includes 87 historic buildings. Located on the shores of Lake Dulverston, Oatlands due to its central location between Hobart and Launceston was once considered as the future capital of Tasmania.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Oatlands was a prosperous rural service centre, and its business community benefited greatly from passing traffic due to its central Highway One location. However, the town suffered significant business and population decline due to the dual impact of rural recession (compounded by devastating drought) and the highway bypass implemented in 1989.

The community has struggled for the last ten years, but a strong community commitment to creating a positive future for their young men and women has helped spawn two initiatives which have given the community purpose and confidence.

Firstly, a vehicle for local action was created in 1994, initially called the Southern Midlands Initiatives for Local Enterprise (SMILE). It came into being following a series of regional health forums involving young people who identified community priorities in terms of training, entertainment and transport. A Future Directions Conference sponsored by the State Government employment agency helped further explore these community priorities. In the words of one founding member of the SMILE - *'we wanted this town to be able to provide some sort of a future for its youth, and we realised pretty early on that the only way of doing that was to have a viable community'* (Fletcher: 1997).

In 1998, the name was changed to Midlands Initiatives for Local Employment (MILE). MILE became an incorporated body, and with an annual grant of $15,000 from the Southern Midlands Council employed an administrative officer to identify and secure outside funding. MILE from the start never saw itself as the destination for funds, or owner of projects, but as a facilitating vehicle. MILE's real achievement was to educate the community about the potential of outside funding. MILE in its first three years helped facilitate over $320,000 in outside funding which enabled a variety of local initiatives to emerge and develop - including Cullington Mill restoration, the creation of a clothing bargain centre, construction of local web page, establishment of an online centre and funding for a suicide prevention program. MILE has attempted to be a vehicle for change rather than assuming responsibility for change.

The initiative that has had the biggest immediate and positive impact on the community (and will provide the basis for ongoing community enhancement) is the creation of the Central Tasmanian Community College. Located in the Old School House, this project was initiated in late 1999 through funding available from the Skill Centre Program and Rural Communities Program. The college has proved a most practical town response to creating the necessary environment required to retain and inspire young people, and giving the community new educational opportunities. The outcome has been a project that has now attracted national interest in terms of replication.

The driving force behind the new College is the local school and its Principal, Keith Wenn, who believes that all curriculum must be *'personally, socially and economically significant'* In Wenn's words - *'I believe we have a role to play in both the future economic viability of the* *student and the society of which that student is a member. Our curriculum then should be reflective of this.'* The Oatlands School has been nationally recognised for its curriculum and teaching approaches, and for its contribution in helping the wider community shape a new rural future. The creation of the College is a natural extension of this philosophy.

In just 12 months, the Community College, through the energy and commitment of its College Manager, Sally Isles, has instigated the following:

- provision of over 160 short courses including a variety of accredited courses that enable local people to improve their employment prospects and/or formalise their qualifications;
- instigation of specific 'Farms in Adversity' courses and support as a response to the local devastating drought conditions;
- creation of a Rural Industrial Centre which now provides training for the largest number of wool classing students in Tasmania as well as a wide range of farmer specific learnings;
- coordination of a Health Expo which attracted a wide range of interactive displays and health providers;
- creation of a conference and meeting venue able to provide seating for 150 people, catering, video conferencing, computer network training room, interactive Team Board, internet access and a wide range of the latest technology. Given Oatlands location, this is proving a great attraction, with two to three conferences per week now being held. In the words of Sally Isles, College Manager - *'people are just blown away by the technology we have in this town and centre'*. The conference centre is bringing people to the town, creating additional local business through catering and the positive and immeasurable social intangibles like local young people seeing new people coming into their town;
- instigation of a Mentor program whereby local young people (years 9-12) trained in web page design (with international accreditation) are mentoring new computer operators and local business people in web design;
- provision of video conferencing facilities. Its varied use has ranged from prisoners being able to communicate with their children who live elsewhere to the local kindergarten going to the Melbourne Zoo, to wine tasting, all via video conferencing;
- provision of career counselling in conjunction with Launceston College utilising an online program;
- development of relevant Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs for local young people. The Community College has been able to offer a fascinating range of VET subjects relevant to labour market opportunity in the local and regional economy, including IT, community service, agriculture, horticulture and retail. In 2000, the program attracted 33 students. The program has established itself as a viable alternative to young people needing to leave the community to seek further education.

A key element of the VET program has been their active design and implementation by young people of projects to enhance the local community. Initiatives have included the revitalisation of the swimming pool with a huge mural, design and planting of new gardens and organisation of a band night 'Youth Voice'. All projects begin with the compilation of a business plan. Such initiatives contribute greatly to the enhanced profile of young people in the community.

The school has also been innovative in other areas to ensure that the community's young people are relevant to their region's economy and labour market. Two years ago the School established a significant Aquaculture Education project. With the active support of the community, farmers and commercial operators, this project continues to evolve in terms of curriculum experiences and state-of-the-art facilities. The curriculum now involves the science of water testing, biology data analysis and such activities as fish smoking, fly tying, fly fishing and small boat safety courses. The Aquaculture Centre was also the source of a national first in 1998 - the nations first industry based tourism course for grades 9/10, with students acting as guides at the centre.

Other school initiatives that are not only creating new pathways for young people, but also serving as community resources are the Agriculture and Research Centre and a community sports and recreation program.

Success factors identified by locals and outside partners include:

- **Commitment to young men and women**. The underlying motivation for much that has happened in Oatlands is youth related. The community has consistently responded to the need to create a youthful environment where young people perceive opportunities for a positive future.

  In the words of Principal Keith Wenn - *'we were not addressing the social and economic aspects of education. Students were going to colleges in Hobart - the option of living and studying in their own rural community wasn't available. So we decided that we were really lessening the possibility of our young people choosing the option of rural life... We knew we had to offer a high quality 16 year plus programme. We actually put a benchmark on it - "at least as good as urban centres, preferably better".'*
- **Awareness and utilisation of outside funding**. Over the last six years, the community has been successful in identifying and securing significant project funding. The commitment of funding by the local council for an administrative assistant to focus on grant identification has certainly been returned to the community tenfold.
- **Embracing of technological change**. By embracing the best in technology, Oatlands demonstrates how a small town can place itself within a global and labour market relevant context. Through the creation of a superior IT centre including the use of video conferencing and the latest technology, Oatlands has created a smorgasbord of educational opportunity, enhanced the marketing opportunities for local businesses and is now exploring its application to heritage tourism. The technology on offer through its conference facilities is a key attraction for the increasing number of groups using the town as a meeting place. The technology available to VET students is amongst the best on offer in the State, and contributes greatly to the growing interest among young people to stay in Oatlands to undertake vocational education.
- **Partnership**. The role of local council as a partner with local groups like MILE and the Community College has been of immense benefit. Its link to commercial organisations like CopyVision has proved invaluable. CopyVision, a leading national organisation in technology has seen the potential of Oatlands as a national demonstration centre, and has been most generous in technology provision and mentoring. Finally as part of the Department of Education's Rural Skill Centre Program, Oatlands has become part of a state network of centres able to take a one stop shop approach to Vocational Education On Line. The support of the Department's Rural Retention Development Officer, Stuart Harvey, has been most significant.
- **Leadership**. Oatlands has been fortunate to have local people both capable and prepared to provide the time, vision and energy to make things happen. Currently the leadership coming from the education sector plays an invaluable role - *'having drivers like Sally and Keith is a real attraction to companies like us becoming sponsors'* (Rod Butler, CopyVision). The college manager fulfils the role of a 'learning facilitator' for both young people and the wider community.
- **Business approach**. The College has been given an establishment grant, but is expected to operate as a business and generate its own income. It's creation of a commercial conference centre and its participation in competitive tendering for ecotourism training reflects this focus, and will help ensure sustainability of the project.

The following quotations from partners in the process further help explain the Oatlands story:

- *'We are often asked why are we involved with Oatlands? Well, firstly it's the people who are driving the initiatives, secondly the town's potential and thirdly the community's passion to provide a positive future for their young people'* (Rod Butler, Director, CopyVision).
- *'Our initiatives have attracted wide interest from rural communities in NSW, Victoria, South Australia and across Tasmania. We are perceived as innovative and modifying the culture of our community. We want our community to foster the development of*

young people as they are our future. The online learning programs, wool classing, aquaculture and information technology projects are providing exciting options for youth and the community. The conference facilities are bringing corporate customers into our town and in turn provide revenue and employment prospects' (Sally Isles, College Manager).

- *'Oatlands is a shining light. Gives me a buzz every time I visit the College. Ideas are continually being generated, and the level of commitment of its leadership is quite exceptional. The initiatives to involve the local community are a great model for other communities'* (Stuart Harvey, Vocational Education and Training Development Officer, Department of Education).
- *'We as a community have still got a long way to go. But what we have is a community which is rising from the stultifying effects of ongoing rural recession and rising from the apathy of powerlessness so that we now have a new beginning'* (Keith Wenn, School Principal).

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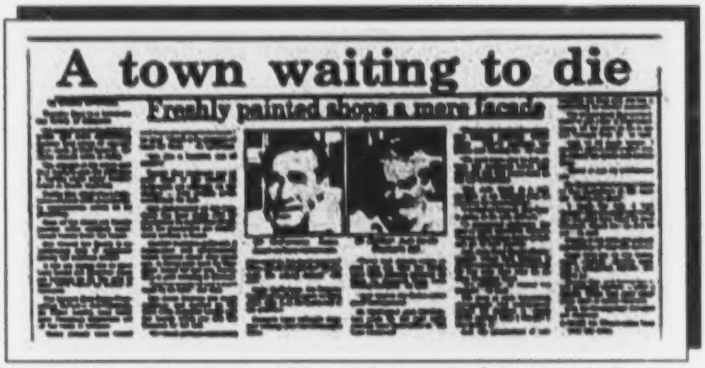
N. Tumby Bay, South Australia



A town waiting to die

Freshly painted shops a mere facade

Tumby Bay is a community of 1,100 people situated on the Eyre Peninsula, 600km by road from Adelaide. The Tumby Bay District Council was proclaimed a municipality in 1906, and for much of the twentieth century, the townsite of Tumby Bay developed as a service centre for dryland farming.

The 1950s, in particular, saw the district and town prosper with agricultural prices at a premium. A feeling of euphoria and confidence in the future resulted in significant community and civic development.

However, changing world commodity prices, natural disasters including drought, flood and mouse plagues, cut back in government spending and high interest rates combined to have a major negative impact on confidence and economic fortunes. On 9 March 1991, the state newspaper, *The Advertiser*, published a story with the title '*A Town Waiting to Die*'. The story commenced with the words *'Tumby Bay is a town on the brink of disaster'*. The story was one of despair. Local residents were quoted with such statements as *'there is no glimmer of hope for them (businesses), no optimism... It's like a bushfire out of control'*, and *'I'm nearly 58 and I don't want to be here'*, *'there are only three or four businesses in town who are doing any good'*, and *'there is just no enthusiasm left'*.

Such a story acted as a trigger for community response. In the words of the Tumby Bay District Community Support and Action Group (1993:11) *'It was like a bomb shell ... the event was the catalyst we needed to become responsible in our plight'*. It prompted a group of concerned residents, supported by the local council to hold a public meeting on a Sunday. All church services were re-scheduled, pubs closed, and throughout the day 345 people shared their views, and planned to arrest the decline of their community.

That event was about ten years ago. Today, Tumby Bay is the third fastest growing rural town in South Australia, and currently land blocks are selling for as high as $71,000. This year, $2 million of new housing is under construction.

That Sunday meeting was a classic community planning event. Participants were divided into 12 groups and generated ideas to respond to specific issues. Building on three themes - economic self sufficiency, social cohesion and political responsibility, a vision for the future was created around the following commitments:

- maintaining population and economic viability;
- sustaining viable primary industry;
- support for local businesses;
- district promotion through tourism and industry;
- meaningful education that fills local needs;
- active community commitment and pride in unity;
- respect for our environment;
- enhance value of family unit;
- improved comprehensive community service;
- improved quality of life and morals;
- more local input into government.

Twelve months later the Tumby Bay District Support and Action Group that evolved from the meeting reported *'It was on June 2nd, 1991, the day after the opening rains that 345 of us*

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gathered for our community meeting. That was the day we really talked to each other. It was the day we dreamed dreams about our future. It was the day we stoutly declared that we were not a dying district, but a district with a future that would call the nation to attention. Well it happened! People all over Australia now know Tumby Bay. They know us because of the community meeting and the depth and breadth of ideas it generated ...'.

A wide range of initiatives have flowed to create today's vibrant community, including:

- Instigation of beautification projects and streetscaping - shops and private residences have been repainted, overhead electric wires removed, new streetscaping within the commercial district and new wooden staircases constructed to connect with the beaches. The project involved six stages.
- Introduction of new information technology opportunities - in 1996 Tumby Bay instigated an Information Technology Centre (Telecentre) as a telecommunication focal point for the community. It has created new educational, business and social opportunities for residents through the achievement of its four objectives, namely:
  - to provide local people access to Information Technology in their own community in a public space,
  - to offer different levels of training and education in computer operations and other topics where necessary to enable skill development for increased job opportunities or business development,
  - to promote the use of information technology and assist people to arrest their fears,
  - to realise opportunities for economic and community development.
- The telecentre is self funded and employs two staff. It provides an extensive range of facilities and a Point of Presence enabling cheap internet access. The Telecentre won the Innovation Award in Local Government in 1998, and accessed over $300,000 from the outside community in a two year period.
- Development of a marina - the Tumby Bay Marina is a $3.3m tidal marina development involving 63 housing blocks and two commercial sites. Despite prices averaging $70,000, 60% of the blocks have been sold. It reflects the boom happening in local housing.
- Focus on retiree attraction - building on the community's natural beauty, fishing and boating advantages and enhanced housing and business infrastructure, Tumby Bay has achieved incredible population growth (2.4% growth over the last year) especially through the targeting of retirees.

Local residents and outside commentators have identified the following as key elements to the revitalisation of Tumby Bay:

- **Catalyst of negative publicity**. Locals refer to the infamous *Advertiser* story *'A Town Waiting to Die'* as a 'bombshell' event. *'Nothing has smacked us in the face like this since they threatened to take away our jetty'* (Tumby Bay District Support and Action Group, 1993:11). The article generated the strong community response to enable progress to begin. It motivated residents to attend the 'Save Tumby Bay' meeting, and get involved. An *Australasian Post* article (1997) captured the experience well in their headline *'The town that cried enough is enough. The people of a place on the brink of collapse banded together - and stitched it together again'*.
- **Attitude and regained pride**. The words of the town's Community Development Officer capture the attitude of many locals - '*If you love your community it is so easy - you can't just sit there and let things fall away'*. Also following the early success with beautification and streetscaping, locals began to see positive change, and began to 'talk up the community'. In the words of the current Council Chairman *'The revival of Tumby Bay was a matter of attitude. We regained community pride. The gradual beautification of the town, the upgrading of the streets, changed people's attitudes'* (Jory, 2000).
- **Smart use of outside media exposure**. Tumby Bay has a history of utilising the State and national media effectively. For example, to raise funds for town beautification, the local council decided to donate a block of land for a national raffle. Response was poor ($100 worth of tickets in four weeks), until a story appeared in *The Advertiser* saying land was available at Tumby Bay for $5 a block - the price of a

raffle ticket. The organiser was swamped with inquiries from across the country. *The Australasian Post* magazine and television crews converged and reported on the town. Within nine weeks $23,000 was raised.

- **Employment of a community development officer**. Local identity Janene Piip was employed early in the process to provide the 'arms and legs' for initiatives. Her infectious enthusiasm matched by strong community skills has given the community a twenty four hour a day local champion always 'opportunity ready'. One other key function has been the identification and procurement of outside technical and financial assistance. In 1998, $291,000 was accessed in grants for 13 different projects, and in 1999 over $230,000 was secured for six projects.
- **Focus on telecommunications**. As a community, Tumby Bay recognised early the importance of investing in telecommunications infrastructure and programs to encourage community upskilling. Their Telecentre, Point of Presence and extensive range of community training programs have placed Tumby Bay within a global context. With over 100 web pages, Tumby Bay now boasts the most comprehensive website of any small Australian town.
- **Creation of a local development vehicle**. Through the planning initiatives, the Tumby Bay Districts Community Support and Action group was created to provide a local development and coordination vehicle. It was crucial in getting things happening, and mobilising the broad based community support. Today the vehicle for action is the Community Development Board representing council, school and the community.
- **Partnership between Council, community and the private sector**. Initially, Council did not see the value of community participation and a focus on economic development. That has now changed and their partnership with the community and the private sector has become a powerful development force. Council has seen itself as facilitative rather than regulative. The $3.3m marina is a joint initiative between the Tumby Bay District Council and private developers. The Community Development Board represents a unique partnership between the District Council, community and the Tumby Area School.
- **Outside recognition**. Recognition from the wider community through media interest and the achievement of national awards has built confidence and determination. In the words of their Development Officer, Janene Piip, *'after we won the Local Government Innovation Award in 1997, I thought that we can do anything*!' During March 2000, the State Working Towns Annual two day conference was staged in Tumby Bay providing an opportunity to show off the community to over 100 community leaders from around the state.
- **Strong support for local business**. Especially through the resources and programs of the Telecentre, a wide range of initiatives are regularly conducted to help build both local farm and farm businesses. Activities include regular business development workshops and business audits, such as an audit of 20 local businesses in relation to e-commerce activities to determine the usage and understanding of IT by local businesses.

The following quotations help explain the positive change that has occurred in Tumby Bay:

- *'The miracle of Tumby Bay is a national case study in persistence, courage and vision. It is the story of a community which decided to take responsibility for its plight rather than become victim to it'* (Rex Jory, Correspondent, *The Advertiser*).
- *'We decided we had to do something ... we not only provided answers for ourselves, but became a model for other struggling towns ... we all become complacent when things are going well. You tend to slip into that comfort zone until the next hard crunch comes. Looking back, though, you can see it has created more community cohesion and provided the basis for a really good mutual approach to our problems. There's also a realisation now that if you want to do something you have to do it yourself. You can't wait for someone to help you out. The community has to back itself and then put in the effort'* (James Bawden, local business person, quoted in *Aussie Post*).

- *In the communities of the Tumby Bay district, we decided that our future would not be dictated merely by global markets or interest rates or political opportunism. . Our fathers forged these communities out of nothing. Surely, we have not surrendered our powers of self determination to the extent that we can no longer be involved in the future of our own district. What we have taken is a small (but we think, significant) step for humanity, for our own self esteem and self determination. It is therefore, a giant leap'* (Tumby Bay District Support and Action Group, 1993:1).
- *'The biggest success that people point to is the change of attitude within the community. Today there is a feeling that their destiny does largely lie in their own hands and not in someone else's'* (Greg Cahill, researcher, 1995:93).
- *'Our history over the last 10 years has shown that success breeds success. Today we believe that anything is possible. The culture of Tumby Bay today is that people can do all sorts of things'* (Janene Piip, Development Officer).

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